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THE RAINBOW BOOK

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LITTLEDOM CASTLE

MY SON AND I

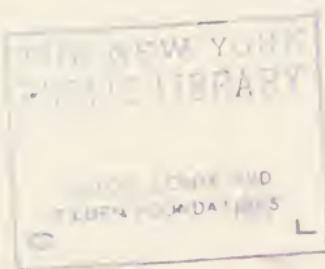
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THE LOVE FAMILY

THE CHILD OF THE AIR



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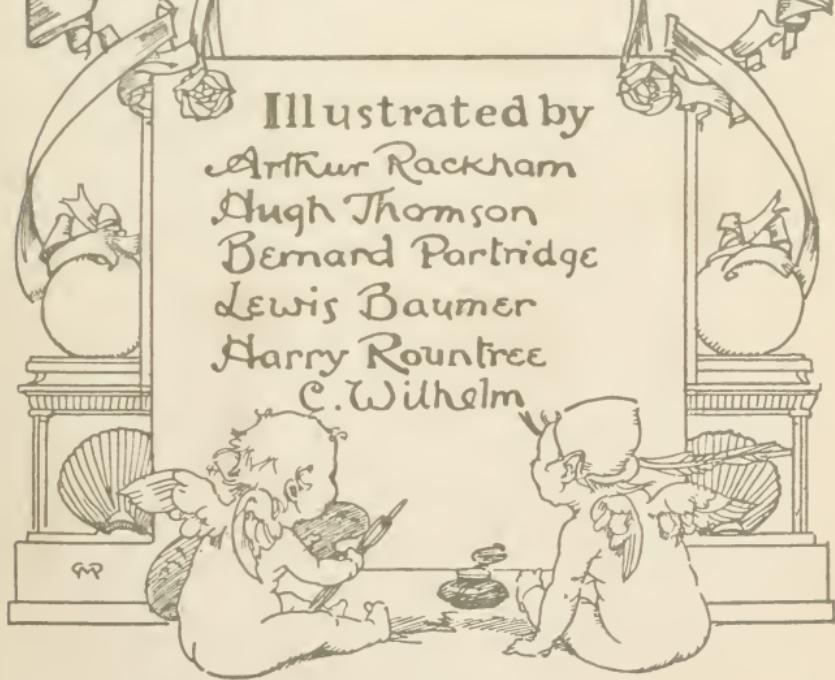
THE Rainbow Book

Tales of Fun & Fancy

By
Mrs M.H. SPIELMANN

Illustrated by

Arthur Rackham
Hugh Thomson
Bernard Partridge
Lewis Baumer
Harry Rountree
C. Wilhelm



NEW YORK
FREDERICK WARNE AND CO.
1909

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TO

BARBARA MARY RACKHAM

WITH ALL GOOD WISHES

FOR HER FUTURE HAPPINESS

MABEL H. SPIELMANN

NEW YORK
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PREFACE

IT'S all very well—but you, and I, and most of us who are healthy in mind and blithe of spirit, love to give rein to our fun and fancy, and to mingle fun with our fancy and fancy with our fun.

The little Fairy-people are the favourite children of Fancy, and were born into this serious world ages and ages ago to help brighten it, and make it more graceful and dainty and prettily romantic than it was. They found the Folk-lore people already here—grave, learned people whose learning was all topsy-turvy, for it dealt with toads, and storms, and diseases, and what strange things would happen if you mixed them up together, and how the devil would flee if you did something with a herb, and how the tempest would stop suddenly, as Terence records, if you sprinkled a few drops of vinegar in front of it. No doubt, since then thousands of people have sprinkled tens of thousands of gallons of good vinegar before advancing tempests, and although tempests pay far less attention to the liquid than the troubled waters to a pint of oil, the sprinklers and their

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descendants have gone on believing with a touching faith. It is pretty, but not practical.

But what *is* pretty and practical too, is that all of us should sometimes let our fancy roam, and that we should laugh as well, even over a Fairy-story. Yet there are some serious-minded persons, very grave and very clever, who get angry if a smile so much as creeps into a Fairy-tale, and if our wonder should be disturbed by anything so worldly as a laugh. A Fairy-tale, they say, should be like an old Folk-tale, marked by sincerity and simplicity—as if humour cannot be sincere and simple too. “The true Fairy-story is not comic.” Why not? Of this we may be sure—take all the true humourless Fairy-stories and take “Alice”—and “Alice” with its fun and fancy will live beside them as long as English stories are read, loved for its fancy and its fun, and hugged and treasured for its jokes and its laughter. The one objection is this: the “true Fairy-story” appeals to all children, young and old, in all lands, equally, by translation; and jokes and fun are sometimes difficult to translate. But that is on account of the shortcomings of language, and it is hard to make young readers suffer by starving them of fun, because the power of words is less absolute than the power of fancy in its merrier mood.

Some people, of course, take their Fairies very

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seriously indeed, and we cannot blame them, for it is a very harmless and very beautiful mental refreshment. Some, indeed, not only believe firmly in Fairies—in their existence and their exploits—but believe themselves to be actually visited by the Little People. For my part, I would rather be visited by a Fairy than by a Spook any day, or night: but when the “sincerity” of some of us drove the Fairies out, the world was left so blank and unimaginative, that the Spooks had to be invited in. The admixture of faith and imagination produces strange results, while it raises us above the commonplaceness of everyday life.

But, as I say, certain favoured people, mostly little girls, it is true, are regularly visited by Fairies even in the broad daylight, and they watch them at their pretty business, at their games and play (for Fairies, you may be sure, play and laugh, however much the Folk-lorists may frown when we are made to laugh with them). Two hundred and fifty years ago a Cornish girl declared that she had wonderful adventures with the Fairies—and she meant truly what she said. And it is only fifty years since an educated lady wrote a sincere account of her doings with Fairies and theirs with her, in an account which was reprinted in one of the most serious of papers, and which showed that the lady, like the uneducated Cornish girl two

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centuries before, was a true “fairy-seer.” Here is a part of her story :—

“ I used to spend a great deal of my time alone in our garden, and I think it must have been soon after my brother’s death that I first saw (or perhaps recollect seeing) Fairies. I happened one day to break, with a little whip I had, the flower of a buttercup: a little while after, as I was resting on the grass, I heard a tiny but most beautiful voice saying, ‘ Buttercup, who has broken your house?’ Then another voice replied, ‘ That little girl that is lying close by you.’ I listened in great wonder, and looked about me, until I saw a daisy, in which stood a little figure not larger, certainly, than one of its petals.

“ When I was between three and four years old we removed to London, and I pined sadly for my country home and friends. I saw none of them for a long time, I think because I was discontented; I did not try to make myself happy. At last I found a copy of Shakespeare in my father’s study, which delighted me so much (though I don’t suppose I understood much of it) that I soon forgot we were living where I could not see a tree or a flower. I used to take the book and my little chair, and sit in a paved yard we had. (I could see the sky there.) One day, as I was reading the ‘ Midsummer Night’s Dream,’ I

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happened to look up, and saw before me a patch of soft, green grass with the Fairy-ring upon it: whilst I was wondering how it came, my old friends appeared and acted the whole play (I suppose to amuse me). After this they often came, and did the same with the other plays."

'There! what do you say to that? Do you wonder that the good folk of Blagdon, for example, still point to the hill "where the fairies come to dance," and show you the Fairy-rings, like that which Cedric saw (as is recounted in this book), with the Little People capering about? Of course, the country folk don't laugh at them, because it is all so mysterious, and, as the scientific professors declare, abnormal, if not supernormal; but do you believe for one moment, that in their joyous dance the fairies do not laugh and joke as well as play and caper? The Bird-Fairy, as appears later, was always grave and loving, and didn't laugh—but then *she* was an enchanted Princess, and had sad and serious business on hand, and was not quite sure, sanguine though she was, of defeating the machinations of the cunning and wicked Wizard. But look at the classic Grimm, at the tiny, dancing, capering tailors whose portraits Cruikshank drew so well in it, and say if there is not a peal of laughter in every open mouth of them, and a chuckle in every limb and joint. Not "comic,"

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Mr. Folk-lorist ? Why, they are the very spirit and personification of comedy and fun !

But then your scientist comes along and tries to explain away the Fairy-rings themselves, which have defied explanation since Fairy-rings first came among us. Once at Kinning Park at Glasgow (and thousands of times elsewhere) four Fairy-rings appeared in one night—on a cricket-ground, if you please ! on which the cricketers had been continuously playing and practising ; and the poets said that they were made by the Fairies dancing under the moonlight, or, when the moon went to bed, by the lamplight of a glow-worm. That, *I* think, must be the truth, simple and sincere. Each ring was a belt of glass darker and greener than the surrounding turf, and was eight or ten inches broad ; and the largest were nine and ten feet in diameter, and the others five and six, measuring from the centre of the belt. And the circles were accurate and the advent of them quite sudden. Clearly, the Fairies *must* have made them. But then a learned professor arose and lectured about them before the British Association. He was a great naturalist, and said that the rings contained a great number of toad-stools. And he brought along a chemist who analysed the fungi, and said he found in them a lot of phosphoric acid and potash and peroxide of iron and sulphuric acid, and

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a lot of things the fairies had never heard of and certainly never brought there, and he said that that, with phosphated alkali and magnesia, accounted for the rings! And then another great professor said that they must have been years in coming, and that electricity might have something to do with it, and that small rings sometimes spread to fifty yards in diameter—which only proves the wonderful power of happy industry of the Fairies, even in their revels and in their play.

So much for the Fairies.

But everybody is not in love with Fairies; some people don't care for them, some (as we have seen) don't even believe in them! Many don't care to read about them, being insensible to their grace and pretty elegance, their exquisite dignity, and their ever-present youth. Who ever heard of a middle-aged fairy? Such folk, be their age what it may, generally prefer fun; especially do they love what Charles Dickens once for all defined and established as the Spirit of Christmas. Well, here they may find Father Christmas at home, and on his rounds. Here they will find revealed and laid bare the whole secret and mystery of Santa Claus—where the presents come from, and where they are stored—how they are packed and how delivered while we are all asleep in our beds, delivered from the waits. Here, too, the “old-

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fangled father" is justified in the eyes of his "new-fangled sons," who recognise that fundamental truths—and such truths!—are not shaken by the on-coming tide of Time. And here, besides, you may learn what goes on on that other side of the moon which we never see, and what is its service to Man, and to Woman and Child as well. And for the first time in the history of romance we discover what it was that the Sleeping Beauty dreamt. And there are stories of other kinds—with a touch of pathos, too.

Story-telling is the oldest of the arts—the art of which we never tire—the art which will be outlived by none other, however fascinating, however beautiful, however perfect. It may deal with human thought and human passion; it may appeal to the highest intellect and the profoundest sentiments of men; or just to the brightest and dreamiest fancy of the young. Be it but well told, even though it does not stir our emotions, the little story delights the imagination, and makes us grateful to the teller for an hour well spent or pleasantly whiled away. That is the greatest reward of the writer, as it is the sole ambition of the author of these little tales.

Mister M. H. SPIELMANN.

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CHAPTER I A KNOCK AT THE RED DOOR

“It’s a shame, Dulcie. We mayn’t go out just because it’s raining a few drops,” said the boy at the nursery window.

“Yes, a fearful shame,” replied his sister. She always sympathised with him and gave in to him, right or wrong. She carefully propped her doll bolt upright on a chair and came to where he stood. “Never mind, Cyril. Let’s play at something.”

“Yes, but I do mind. It’s too bad! It’s always ‘you mustn’t’ this, ‘you mustn’t’ that. It would be a saving of breath if they’d just say the few things that we *might* do. Are you willing to go on putting up with it? I suppose you are, as you’re only a girl.”

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“No, I don’t want to, but I’ve got to. Mother says it is for our good, and we are spoilt.”

“I don’t think so at all. It’s very hard lines,” growled Cyril. “I’m sure the garden isn’t a bit wet, and the rocks have only a sprinkle.”

Certainly the window panes had more than a sprinkle trickling down them. But the birds were twittering fussily in the bushes and amongst the ivy, and the garden was looking its best in the summer shower. Fitful gleams of sunshine cast loving touches here and there on the roses and the sweet honeysuckle; and the tall white lilies never looked fresher or smarter. Beyond, were those tempting rocks, with their surroundings of sand, which rose so strangely in that part of inland Kent, telling of former ages and of the vagaries of the sea and river. The rocks were the happy playground of these lucky Twins, who lived in the fine solitary house close by, and who were now peering so disconsolately through the window, flattening their noses against the glass blurred with the pattering rain.

They were exactly the same height; they resembled one another in feature, and, being twins, were both nine years old; and there the likeness ended, for his dark hair was short and thick, and hers was fair and very long. She was timid and gentle though her bright face was very happy; he, what is termed “a handful.”

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“*I know!*” exclaimed Dulcie after a moment’s silence, drawing her brother away from the melancholy amusement of tracing down the trailing drops with his finger until they disappeared mysteriously at the bottom of the glass. “*I know!* Let’s play ‘Birds, Beasts, and Fishes.’”

Cyril cast a lingering look at the tiresome dark clouds, then with a sigh and a frown turned round in token of consent, graciously suffered himself to be settled at the table with paper and pencil, and was soon excitedly trying to guess what Dulcie’s Bird could be that began with the letter *c*, had four between, and ended with an *e*.

“It’s very easy, really,” pleaded Dulcie, burning to tell. “Do you give it up?”

Cyril wasn’t so easily beaten as that, and thought till he grew impatient.

“Shall I tell you?—*Let me tell you!*” urged his sister.

“If you like,” he replied magnanimously.

“Canare!”

“I’m sure it’s spelt with a *y*,” he said, as if he weren’t quite certain in spite of his words.

They argued who should score the mark, and settled the point by counting it a draw. She followed it up with a Fish, which was *s*, two between, and an *l*, which puzzled Cyril until he found, of course, that it was “soul.”

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Believing he had lost again, he allowed his interest in the game to flag, and still restless, he ran to the window.

“Hooray! it’s fine now,” he cried. “Come along, we don’t want hats!”

“*Ought* we to go, do you think, Cyril, without asking?”

“I’m not going to ask, not if I know it. We would be sure to be ‘don’t’-ed. I’m going out. It’s so stuffy here. You can do as you like.”

“If you go, I shall go too,” she replied quickly, following him and taking his hand. He didn’t quite like that, but he felt, as she was “only a woman,” he would let her.

Away they ran lightly, out into the sunshine, happy to be in the warm, scented air, through the garden, off to the dear old rocks which were already drying nicely, and at once a fine game of hide-and-seek was in full swing.

Dulcie had gone again to hide, and Cyril had his face buried in his hands, waiting for the familiar “Cuckoo!” when he was startled instead by a faint cry of surprise, followed by “Cyril, come quick! Quick!”

“It must be a beetle or a toad, or something,” he said to himself as he hurried to the spot from which her voice seemed to come; but it was only after she had repeated her excited cries that he found her at last.

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She had found a passage through the rocks which they had never noticed before !

“Come along !” cried Cyril joyously at the sight of it. “Come along ! we’ll go on a voyage of discovery !”

Down the passage they went, far and carefully, for there was only a glimmer of light in a thin streak peeping through, because the rocks all but joined at the top, and the ground was uneven and slippery. But in spite of their caution they got a sudden start, for they became aware of a silent brook flowing deep and swiftly by, at their feet : another step and they would have been in it. The Twins, rather startled, looked at one another, and then without further thought they just jumped across. Jumped into an open space—into MOONLIGHT. There was actually a full moon overhead, but with such seams and lines about it that it bore the appearance of being pieced together like a geographical puzzle.

“Cyril, look there !” whispered Dulcie, pressing close up to him, as soon as she found words.

In the white light there stood an immense rock. In it there was a wooden door with hewn-out steps leading up to it. A nice red door it was, with a green knocker upon it in the shape of a mouth smiling a welcome. Of course they went up to it, climbed the steps, which were high and difficult, and

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stared at the neatly engaved brass plate below it, which bore the words :

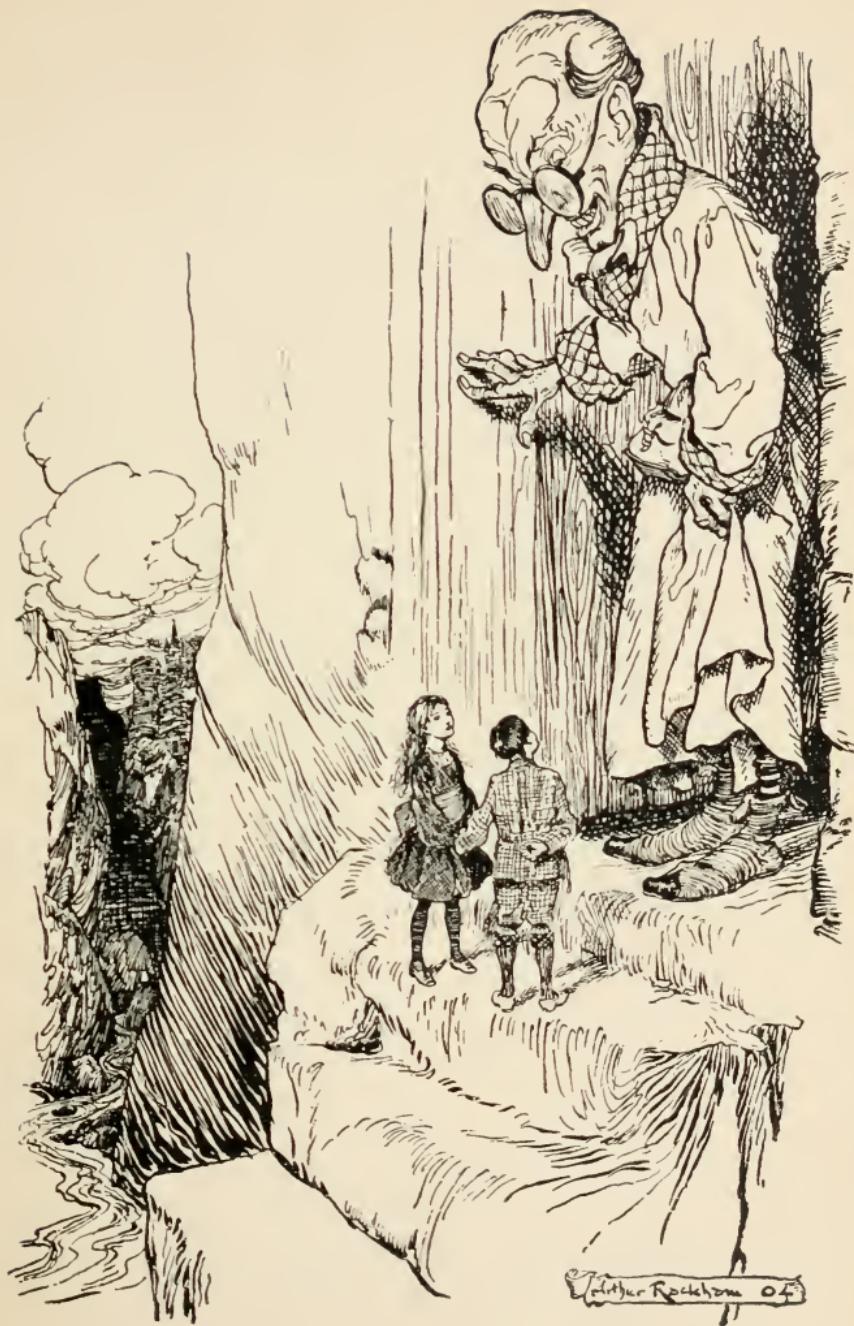
*Knock if an answer is required.
If not, why?*

“ I’m going to knock,” said Cyril.

“ Oh no, we don’t want any answer,” said Dulcie, “ so why do it ? ”

A backward glance at the steps puzzled her, for they had grown steeper than before and impossible to climb down again, or up, for the matter of that, and the door before which they stood was now at such a height from the ground as to make her feel giddy to look below. She hardly had time to think about it when Cyril raised the knocker and let it go. Instead of the usual sound a knocker makes, a loud laugh rang out, discordant and disconcerting. “ You needn’t be frightened,” he remarked, for his little sister hung back and tightened her grasp of his arm. The next moment the door swung open and there stood on the threshold a very tall man with an enormous bald head. He was clad in a yellow satin dressing-gown, and wore great smoke-coloured spectacles.

“ So you’ve come to see the Wizard,” he said blandly. “ Pray walk in ! ”



"So you've come to see the Wizard," he said

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ADVENTURES IN WIZARD-LAND

“ I—I think we’d—we’d rather not, thank you very much,” stammered Cyril, very red, whilst Dulcie looked up, pale and wondering. “ We’re not dressed for visiting,” she urged in a loud whisper in her brother’s ear.

“ But you require an answer, or why knock ? ” retorted the strange man. “ *Pray* walk in,” he repeated. He was so polite.

The door swung behind them, and the trembling twins found themselves alone with the Wizard in a very large cave, where the walls glowed with phosphorescent light, while the further end was hidden in deep gloom.

CHAPTER II

THE WIZARD AT HOME

“How do you do?” said the Wizard, as if he remembered he had forgotten to ask. The Twins shyly shook hands with him and said they were quite well, thank him. They didn’t want to a bit, but he seemed to expect it. “Let’s talk matters over,” he added with a smile. It was such a winning smile that the children began to feel less uncomfortable. “You’re not always quite content, I believe,” and he rubbed his hands cheerfully together. “That mother of yours interferes rather too much, eh?” With a rapid movement he pushed his spectacles away on to the top of his bumpy baldness, revealing a pair of small eyes with a red, slumbering glow in them.

As Cyril didn’t reply Dulcie ventured to remark, “If you please, my brother thinks she says ‘don’t’ too often.”

“But how do you know that?” interrupted Cyril, who, though surprised, took a more practical view of the situation.

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“Because,” slowly replied the Wizard, taking off his spectacles and scratching his big nose with them—“because I was an optician in my youth and made these glasses, through which I have only to look to see people as they really are and not what they appear to be. [“How clever!” broke in Dulcie under her breath.] I found out at a glance that you are discontented with your lot, and prefer to be free. You are tired of control, eh? Isn’t that the state of Home Affairs?”

“Yes,” said Cyril, once more full of his wrongs. “It’s only children who are not allowed to do what they want. Grown-ups do as they like; so does our dog; he goes out and comes in when he likes, eats when he wants, leaves what he likes—or rather, what he doesn’t like; so does our cat. You see,” he continued, growing quite chummy, “we are never allowed to do this, that, and the other, like other people—animals, I mean—and they are free and happy, and they needn’t bother with lessons. It’s so stupid being a child!” he concluded plaintively, and Dulcie nodded a similar opinion.

“Just as I thought. Well, I shouldn’t put up with it if I were you,” replied their new friend, smiling again, and scratching his nose with his spectacles in his thoughtful, insinuating manner. “I should advise you to go your own way, seek

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your own fortunes, and find your own happiness for yourselves. We must see what we can do to help you to freedom. Eh?"

The little guests did not think to thank him, for their eyes had begun to roam with curiosity over the strange things that were all about. The cave dwelling was queerly furnished, if it could be called furniture. There were animals of all sizes and shapes, standing around stuffed, staring, and immovable. Snakes, fish, small birds; an elephant just like life standing rigidly next to a number of grinning stuffed monkeys; while a crocodile with open jaws looked snaps at a startled fawn with wide-set eyes. It was like a frozen Zoological Gardens.

"Once upon a time," remarked the Wizard, following the children's sourcee of interest, "all those poor creatures were children like you. Ah! their end was sad, very sad; very sad indeed!"

The Twins didn't like that remark at all, nor did they relish the winning smile this time that accompanied it. Then bursting out laughing he exclaimed—

"Now I'll show you something funny," and he brought out from a corner what looked like a cinematograph. "Look!" he said as he touched a spring and set it going.

There was a hissing sound, and the gloom at the

ADVENTURES IN WIZARD-LAND

end of the cave passed away, and there marched along in living procession all the inhabitants of their Noah's Ark.

Dulcie and Cyril were transfixed with delight at this charming entertainment.



"All those poor creatures were children"

"And we don't pay anything to come in!" remarked Cyril softly to his sister. "It can't pay him. They're all going in for safety, you see—all the birds, all the beasts——"

"Where are the fishes?" anxiously interrupted his little sister in a whisper.

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“Don’t be such a Billy,” retorted Cyril with a frown; “the fishes are used to being drowned.”

After Noah went into the Ark and had shut the door, the gloom reappeared. The show was over.

“That’s a little idea of my own,” remarked the Wizard as he put the machine away. “Amusing, isn’t it?”

The Twins nodded. Then he invited the children to look through a hole in the wall of the cave, and they saw a small room.

“That’s my hospitable bedroom,” he said, “that I’ve endowed myself with. When I’m down in the mumps from being crouped up here so long, I go there and wrap myself up in thoughts all nice and smug. It is fitted with the epileptic light, rheumatic bells, and all the latest infections.

“Now, what were we talking about before? Ah yes! My inventions. None of your modern up-to-date rubbish, only inventions of the future for me. None of your wireless telephony and wireless telegraphy for me. Listen to this.” He called out—

“Number A. 1. Sea Power! Have you been successful in that last little financial venture, Sire?”

There were rushing sounds, as of waves, at the far end of the cave, and a muffled voice replied—

“No, Cabalistic One, I have lost again. Just

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my luck ! Dash—sh—sh—” which resolved itself into the swish-swish of rolling surf. Then all was quiet again.

“ The reply of a friend of mine residing far away at a place called ‘ The Billows,’ ” explained the Wizard in an offhand way. “ I help him in his little transactions, which are sometimes rather—in fact very— ! ” and raising his arm he smothered a laugh in his yellow satin sleeve which was not pleasant to hear. “ I always like to laugh up there,” he explained, as the children looked surprised.

Dulcie’s hand stole into her brother’s and she whispered him to “ Come away, come away, do, quick, and let’s go home.”

“ But you haven’t seen any of my marvellous jewellery yet,” replied their host, as though she had spoken aloud.

“ Don’t be timid”—he was looking at them through those horrid spectacles again, which laid bare all their thoughts. “ You know I am only answering that knock of yours. Had you not required an answer, there would have been no information forthcoming. I should just like to show you these bracelets I have here.” He pushed his glasses across his baldness and took two jewelled golden circlets out of a satchel which hung from the cord of his gown. “ Other children have taken great interest in them,” said the Wizard slowly—

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He took two jewelled circlets out of a satchel

I mean the *real* thing—to be actually the real

“in fact have worn all the gems out. But I’ve often had them done up again; and you are both welcome to them—very welcome to them, if you like. You see, *they* are able to inform their wearers how to play at ‘Birds, Beasts, and Fishes’ *properly*.”

“We know already,” replied the boy and girl together, now restlessly impatient to be gone.

“I don’t mean that tiresome educational game you were playing when you were waiting in because of those few drops of rain.

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animals themselves in the realms of the Birds, Beasts, and Fishes. Only in that way can children realise how much nicer it is to be one of them, and to live a life free from the 'don'ts' and vexatious care of their elders. Ah! Now you're interested!"

The Twins were staring at him open-mouthed.

"These bracelets," continued the Wizard, whilst the ten catseye gems in each of them gleamed curiously as he spoke—"see—aren't they beautiful?—

THESE BRACELETS WILL EMPOWER THE WEARERS TO BECOME BIRD, BEAST, OR FISH, AT EACH WISH; TO REGAIN HIS SHAPE, OR HER SHAPE, AT WILL, AND TO LIVE IN ANY ATMOSPHERE—OR IN NONE! At every change of form a catseye will disappear and return to me. With the last wish the wonderful adventures will be over, and the shape last chosen will remain to the end of existence. All these silly animals in my dwelling came at the last to seek my help as they were dissatisfied. I did what I could, which wasn't much. Of course I don't want so many of them here," he added carelessly, scratching his nose with his glasses, "though they do help with my experiments—they do that—oh yes—but I always advise getting experience first. They somehow got to know that *as children under ten* they could only pass *into* my MOONLIGHT and never *out of* it; and

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that my faithful BROOK would not see them twice. So they came for help in their last shapes as animals. Oh!" he added, pulling himself up with evident pretence, "I helped them right enough! They should have kept a pair of catseyes—I warned them—and they might have crossed my BROOK in some other shape than their own and changed to themselves the other side. But somehow they were not fortunate enough to manage that. Some people are so thoughtless. Pray excuse me, my dears, there's some one at the knocker," and throwing the bracelets into a corner where they glittered strangely, the Wizard vanished.

"Come away, do come away," implored Dulcie, plucking at her brother's sleeve. "I'm so frightened," she whimpered. "Don't touch them. Oh! I want to go home."

"But, sis, you heard what he said. We can't cross his horrid brook twice whilst we are under ten. Crying won't help," replied the boy sturdily. Nevertheless, he looked terribly frightened himself, although he patted her shoulder comfortingly. "*I feel I must!*" he muttered; "besides, it's our only way out of here, and get out of here we must, and escape in some other shape."

Cyril hastily picked up the bracelets, put one on his wrist and the other on Dulcie's, and taking her by the hand dragged her right into the gloomy

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part of the cavern farther and farther away from the hateful dwelling and its awful master. He couldn't tell where he was leading her, but he ran blindly on until at last there was daylight in the distance. And the Twins found themselves surrounded by haystacks, windmills, and other country objects.

“Ah!” exclaimed Cyril with delight, “see how I've saved you, Dulcie!”

“And a good job too,” she replied with conviction.

So they wandered gaily on, laughing at anything and everything in the happiness of their escape. They *were* happy, anyhow; happy in their absolute freedom. And were they not in the possession, too, of the precious bracelets which were going to lead them into all sorts of delightful adventures as soon as they chose! They could talk of nothing else—and babbled on of how they would cross the brook as animals, and how they would be wiser than all the other poor creatures, by keeping a gem in reserve and change to themselves on the other side.

Little could they guess of the troubles and adventures that awaited them!

CHAPTER III

THE BIRD-FAIRY SPEAKS

THE children had been so busy chattering of fun to come, that it was all of a sudden they realised they were in a glade which looked quite enchanting, and with so many daisies about that Dulcie wanted to sit down and weave those they gathered into a chain.

“Don’t wait for that,” said Cyril; “carry them in my handkerchief.”

But when he felt in his pockets the handkerchief was not there. He must have dropped it. Dulcie proposed that they should retrace their steps, but sweet sounds of innumerable birds came from the high trees around and filled the air—and they stayed to listen to the concert of trills, chirrups, gentle call-notes, cadences, and bursts of tremulous song. And now, against the deep blue sky hovered what looked like a cloud which suddenly separated and descended, and the Twins found themselves face to face with a most lovely being, surrounded by a ring of exquisite little creatures, who danced to the continuous music of the Wood

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Cyril and Dulcie gazed at their beautiful companion, who stepped towards them smiling graciously. She looked like a lovely young girl. Draped about her was a wondrous garment of feathers of every hue. But she was strange in



"I am the Bird-Fairy," she said

deed, for her hands, clasped behind her, drew close together two enormous wings which sprouted from her shoulders and formed part of her white arms; whilst upon her shapely head among her black tresses was the aigrette of the peacock. Her attendants had no aigrette, and their feathered

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draperies were of sober brown. They were much smaller too, smaller even than the Twins.

“I am the Bird-Fairy,” she said in cooing tones, “and you are in need of advice. I can——”

“Not exactly, thanks. You *are* pretty!” stammered Cyril, interrupting. “It’s because—we want to go our own way—at home we——” he stopped in order to shake off Dulcie, who was tugging at his jacket.

“If you please,” asked Dulcie shyly, “what advice?”

“It would be exactly contrary to the Wizard’s,” and the Fairy looked serious.

“Thanks very much,” interrupted Cyril; “but we do want to seek our fortunes—to go on our adventures. It’s a grand thing to do,” he explained, “specially for her—she’s a girl. Besides, we can’t cross the Brook as children.”

“Don’t use those catseyes and it might be possible; that is, if you are willing. Be warned! Let me carry you quickly to the other side and then run home,” said the Bird-Fairy anxiously.

Cyril shook his head, so Dulcie shook hers.

“It’s always ‘don’t,’ ” he muttered. “It’s sure to be all right, Dulcie,” he said turning to her.

“Are you sure?” she inquired vaguely, with a lingering glance at the Fairy, who had turned away sadly.

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“ It must be if we keep that last change as we arranged.”

From the trees now issued forth sweet wood-birds of many kinds—the air was thick with them; they circled three times round the fairy ring and then all flew away, and the children were once more alone.

“ Wasn’t that beautiful? Ah!” sighed Dulcie, looking after them, “ I wish I could be one of them and sing like them.”

Hardly were the words out of her mouth when Cyril began to stare about in amazement. His sister was nowhere to be seen. Her disappearance was so rapid that the earth might have swallowed her up.

“ Dulcie, Dulcie,” he cried. “ Wherever are you? Come back at once when I tell you!”

Nothing stirred in the stillness except the waving branches of the tall trees—and a little bird that came and perched upon his shoulder and began softly to trill into his ear what meant nothing to him. He stroked its smooth plumage. His hand touched something hard around its throat. He parted the feathers and found—a golden circlet set with catseyes, one of which was missing.

“ Oh!” he exclaimed. “ It’s her!”

He was too flustered to talk grammar. “ How fearfully quick the change came about—only just

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a slight hint like that! I say! We *shall* have to look out! I wonder how you like it, you pretty little bird! I wish I could understand those chirping sounds!"

Instantly he became like her—a lark. He understood her at once, and the pair flew away, singing gaily as they rose together, fluttering up and up, soaring high and ever higher into the blue azure of the cloudless sky.

Never was there such a blissful sensation as that, flying heavenwards to the music of their own making. Dancing at a party to the accompaniment of a piano was mere ordinary child's play compared to the invigorating delight of this new experience. The earth looked like a map, and they realised now what was meant by a "bird's-eye view." After a time, still singing, they dropped quickly down to earth. Then Cyril led the way into the Wood, where they perched in one of the highest trees; and they hopped about, scanning their surroundings, and awaiting the visits of other little feathered inhabitants whose acquaintance they expected to make. In the meantime they gleaned various scraps of news from certain twitterings in the adjoining branches, some of which they clearly overheard.

And it came as a shock that these twitterings were mostly complaints about the scarcity of pro-

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visions ; about starvation among the weak birds who could not compete against the strong ; about the unfair scrambling for tit-bits which caused grievous bodily hurt. Then a painful rumour was discussed about poor little Mother Starling, who had been taken unawares by a wild beast with terrible whiskers who was seen to pounce upon her and carry her off—and her husband, who still went about vainly calling his mate and would not be comforted. They heard how, in the hospitals under the hedges, things were in a bad way—how one patient was down with a broken wing, with no hope of getting well in time to migrate ; and of others incurable, and resigned.

All this so depressed the two joyous young larks that they flew some distance away, when through the leaves they discovered in the tree next to them nothing less than the beautiful Bird-Fairy reclining asleep in the branches with her retinue of little sprites in various attitudes all around her, their shining eyes wide open, on guard.

The absolute silence proved too monotonous for our lively pair. So away they flew again—miles and miles away into the open country, enjoying to the fullest freedom found at last, feeding in the sun-gilded fields, drinking from the pools, bathing in the sandy roads, and flying for all they were worth in their youthful spirits. Life like this was life indeed !

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Their happiness seemed complete, when a sudden sense of horror struck them both at the same moment, and hardly had they realised it when they noticed something very large which had been poised above swooping towards them, striking terror into their souls as it came. It was a sparrow-hawk, and death was upon them. Instinctively they swerved out of its terrible course, and commenced a series of short, zig-zag flights, their eyes starting nearly out of their little heads with fright. The enemy was strong on the wing and remorseless in purpose. The poor larks, with hearts fluttering wildly, were becoming feeble and less alert. The next second the hawk would seize one of its prey. The little bird gave an agonised chirp, dropped like a stone to the ground, and changed into Dulcie, affrighted and panting for breath. She looked anxiously upwards. Her pursuer, baulked, turned and darted upon its second quarry. Too late! Cyril had taken the strong hint, had also wished, and now stood in safety on the ground beside her.

“Come on!” he shouted to the surprised and baffled enemy. “Come on now, and I’ll wring your ugly neck!”

But the bird didn’t wait to accept his polite invitation; and a moment later it was out of sight, and out of mind, and the children

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found they were again alone in the beautiful glade.

“I don’t want to be a bird any more,” said Dulcie when she had recovered her composure.

“No, it’s too risky,” admitted her brother. “When that big dark thing came in sight there was so little time to think what to do. That second, too,” he added with a shudder, “when I thought the brute had got you, was too awful!”

She felt quite important now at having gone through such peril.

“I could never have imagined that birds had such a lot to put up with,” mused Cyril as they walked on—“hunger and suffering, with the risk any moment of being gobbled up!”

“There ought to be some one to take care of the poor things,” remarked Dulcie. “If it hadn’t been for the catseyes we should have been eaten up and ended like that.” She glanced at the bracelet on her wrist and added, with a timid look at her brother, “It seems safer as we are.”

“Bosh!” he rejoined. “We want adventures. That’s what we’re going for—and freedom. We had a ripping time as larks—till the end. It certainly wasn’t very comfortable then.”

CHAPTER IV

THE LOST CATSEYE

SOMETHING was in their path ; the Twins stooped to examine it and found it to be a Hedgehog standing on its hind legs, motionless, as though waiting for somebody, and a smile was upon the face of that Hedgehog. All at once a Porcupine sprung up beside it, as if out of the earth, and the two appeared on the very best of terms.

“I *must* get to know what they are talking about,” exclaimed Dulcie. “They seem to me to be arguing about something interesting. Oh, I do wish I could be all ears and understand them ! If only I were something as small as a mole !” Before Cyril could remonstrate a mole she was, went off blindly, and was quickly lost to view amongst the thick brushwood.

“I say ! I do call that *mean*,” he complained. “Without even so much as asking my advice or saying good-bye. It’s silly to become a stupid mole ; it’s a waste of a catseye. And all on account of a beastly spiky hedgehog and a beastly

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prickly porcupine. Halloo! Wherever have you all got to?"

Out of humour, he looked right and left. They were nowhere to be seen. "I hope she will soon come to her senses!" he muttered. "It isn't much fun being left like this."

He lay down on his back to await her, and kicked up his legs in the air as a pastime, whilst the tall trees above him waved their upper branches in the breeze. His glittering bracelet caught his attention, causing his thoughts to drift on adventures past and to come. He looked harder at it, and becoming concerned he carefully counted the missing catseyes. He had only wished to be a lark, and to be himself. Yet THREE were gone! The two first—and the *last* one! "Could this," he asked himself, "be some dreadful trick of the Wizard's—likely to occur at the last?" Cyril turned pale at the possibility. "Or could that last one have become loose and got lost?" he pondered. If so, he realised that it must be found. The thought about the Wizard worried him. He was uneasy, too, about Dulcie, and sat up eagerly listening for her coming, and wondering what he had better do.

Meanwhile, our little mole had groped its way to a hole whence could be heard sounds of a quaint voice. It was that of the Porcupine saying pretty

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poetry softly to the accompaniment of a slow musical titter.

“ I’m a brave and dashing Porcupine—
Strong, elegant, and dandy ;
And you a Hedgehog, bright as wine,
And sweet as sugar-candy.
Dear Hedgehog fair, say you’ll be mine
And wed the dandy Porcupine !
Dear Hedgehog—bright as currant-wine,
Take me—as strong as brandy,
Be Mrs. Porcupine, I pray—
I’ve begged so often—don’t say nay—
Be Mrs. Porky, sweet and jolly.
Nay—titter not,
Or off I’ll trot
And straightway marry Molly.”

“ Ah ! ” he observed after a long pause, during which the Hedgehog had remained silent and had never moved a quill in response, “ There goes Molly the Mole ! ”

Molly the Mole, who had distracted his attention, heeded him not, but went and struck up an acquaintance with the little stranger in the hole close by. For some time they remained in close conversation. It was not at all an amusing conversation, as Dulcie explained later, and she was not sorry when the danger of a horse’s hoofs galloping nearly on top of them caused them to run off. They got separated, and Dulcie was glad to bring herself again into the

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possession of her own five senses. Peeping from behind a tree, she saw Molly and the Hedgehog walking off together, leaving the Porcupine disconsolate. And then she beheld a young girl with short red hair dismount from her horse, walk back rapidly towards some glittering object, and pick it up.

Dulcie recognised at once the curious colouring of a catseye. She glanced at the bracelet on her wrist; all was in order there. Could it possibly belong to Cyril? The thought became a certainty. “Stop!” she called out loudly.

Too late—horse and rider were off.

“Stop! Stop thief!” shouted Dulcie as she ran after them as fast as she could.

Now Cyril, who was not the soul of patience at any time, had come to the conclusion that it was of no use waiting any longer, and that it would be better to be up and doing. So he got up and pondered again and again what to do.

“Any way I’d better risk it and become a cat,” he decided, “for like that I’ve more chance of finding Dulcie, and of finding my catseye. It would be useful to be able to see in dark corners. But I’ll search about as I am first.”

He spent some time peering and searching in the Wood. But without success. Neither Dulcie nor the catseye was to be found.

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Just then he heard a noise. He stepped behind a tree, and peering round from behind it he beheld not far off a young lady dismount from her horse and pick up something. Cyril recognised it as his catseye. He approached timidly to claim it, when she leapt up and cantered off, evidently not seeing or hearing the boy who was running, shouting with lusty lungs : “Stop! Hi! Stop thief!”

Little did he know that his little sister, almost exhausted, was further behind gasping out the same cry—while big tears from helplessness and anxiety were coursing down her hot cheeks. For the trees hid the children from view at the distance they were apart, as well as from the rider ; and shout as they would, their cries could not be heard by one another.

Cyril soon lost sight of the new owner of the gem, and didn’t know what to do, or where to trace it, or, still worse, what had become of Dulcie. As he came to a narrow footpath which branched off from the main track, he went quickly along it in the hope that it might prove to be a short cut to somewhere. As it turned out he was lucky, for it proved to be a short cut to a Town, and hardly had he entered one of the streets than at the other end he saw entering it the rider on her horse. He ran towards her, but only arrived just as the girl with red hair disappeared through the door of a large white house, and the horse was being ridden off by her groom.

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So Cyril sauntered on, anxiously meditating how to get his belonging back. The present possessor would never believe his tale, or if she did the less likely would she be to part with a thing so valuable—and then perhaps only for a hundred pounds. He concluded he must take it—it was his—at least it was more his than hers, and his life might depend upon it. So he decided that the best thing he could do was to change into a monkey, climb into the house by one of the open windows, grab the gem as soon as found, and escape as quickly as he could.

But no sooner did the quaint little monkey stand there than it was pounced upon by a dirty brown hand, whilst a foreign voice exclaimed—

“Ah, ha! So dere you are, my leetle friend! You shall not escape from me again so soon, Jacko. Ah no!”

It was a ragged boy with a hurdy-gurdy, who had caught hold of the little twisting, mouthing creature and was already getting it into a miniature soldier’s coat with brass buttons. A ludicrous doll’s hat with a long feather upstanding was quickly produced from his pocket, put on its head, and the elastic slipped under its chin. A long cord was whipped out, fixed to the red coat, and a sudden jerk hitched up the whole arrangement on to the barrel-organ in a twinkling.

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Now Dulcie had also taken the short cut into the Town, and was just going to enter a large garden in order to rest her weary limbs after her useless chase, when the boy and monkey attracted her attention and she stopped. She would have laughed, so comic was the sight, but filled with concern at a rough jerk she cried: "Oh, please don't. You'll hurt it. Do let it go!"

"Let go, signorina? Ah no! Me take care never risk no more. No Jacko, then poor Pietro starve. Just you watch him, then give poor Pietro penny. Now, Jacko, we're 'ungry."

Had Dulcie only known the monkey was not Jacko, but Cyril, she would have been still more concerned. The lad turned the handle of the instrument, and to its cracked tune she was amused to see the monkey take off its hat with a jerky movement, replace it, dance about, salute, and perform other antics in the most approved and undignified manner.

The boy pulled his forelock. After much fumbling Dulcie found a penny and gave it to him. A sunny smile was on his swarthy face as he said "Grazia!" He kissed the monkey affectionately, and putting it in the inner pocket of his ragged coat, moved away.

And the monkey, peering out of that pocket, blinked twice so meaningly at Dulcie that she

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stood there and gazed after it, puzzled, whilst the boy trudged off whistling. Dulcie then found a shady seat, and having nothing better or more hopeful to do, determined to rest there. Now, however, that she had leisure to think it over, she didn't at all like the loss of that gem. Supposing by some trick or other of that horrid Wizard all the rest should drop out and not be found—at some dreadfully awkward moment! What would poor Cyril do? And she also might come to be in the same plight! These thoughts were too horrible! So she began saying some poetry she had learnt in order to keep her mind on other matters.

She wasn't enjoying herself very much. The time seemed endless, and a neighbouring clock which chimed the quarters didn't help it to pass any faster; and the longer Dulcie waited, the more anxious she became. She gave up reciting poetry, or what stood for poetry, and her only thought became: "If only Cyril would come back!" In her fear she began to give up hope of his ever coming back at all, and decided to try and discover if there were such a thing as a policeman about, to whom she might confide her troubles.

Suddenly there arose a hullabaloo. Such a barking and rushing, and the next moment a large

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black cat sprang on the seat beside her, frightening her very much. There was a terrified shriek—a gratified Wish—and Cyril found himself on a bench next Dulcie with a great hound clinging to his sailor collar at the back.

With a cry of fear she helped him in his struggles to get free; the animal, astonished and abashed, slunk away with its tail between its legs, and the brother and sister fell into one another's arms. Never before had they known how fond they were of one another—for never had they been so pleased to meet again.

“I waited so patiently,” said Dulcie; she didn’t add anything about thoughts of a friendly policeman, but inquired quickly—

“Do you know you’ve lost your catseye?”

He nodded and grinned.

“Have you got it?”

He parted his lips. It was between his teeth. He pressed it back into the empty setting of his bracelet, saying—

“I’d no time to wish sooner. I’ll never set Towser to chase our poor little Miranda again, you bet! How horrid it must be to be a permanent cat!”

“However did you get it back?”

“Hallo! Hi!” was all she got in answer, and the next moment he was pommelling into, and being pommelled by, a lanky youth.

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“I’ll teach you—to shy stones—at a—poor defenceless—cat,” gasped Cyril, hitting out right and left, his face scarlet, and his hair all ruffled. How they did go for one another! First one was down and the other on top; then the pair, all legs and arms, were the other way up; then they rolled together over and over, till at last Cyril had won a brilliant victory before he allowed Dulcie to drag him away from the defeated adversary, who, as soon as he was free, slunk off miserably, with one hand to his eye and his handkerchief to his nose.

“I’m all right,” exclaimed Cyril, in answer to her anxious inquiry, shaking himself into order. “That *was* a lark! No—I’m not hurt, not really. Served him jolly!”

Dulcie noticed that he had a lump on his forehead from the fray.

“I’m glad you won the fight with that boy, but I don’t know what it was about one little bit. And, Cyril, aren’t these adventures rather too—too dangerous, don’t you think?”

“Of course they’re not, they’re awfully jolly.”

“Now tell me all about it from the very beginning,” said his sister as they strolled off together. So Cyril gave her a spirited record of his adventures whilst she listened eagerly, anxious not to miss a single word.

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“I’ll begin at the beginning,” he said. “Well, the funny monkey—me, you know—”

“*You, Cyril?*” and Dulcie gasped with surprise.

“Yes; don’t interrupt, there’s a dear. I quite enjoyed my little performance on the organ before you. But by the second and third time I had to do it I got sick and tired of it. The weather seemed to turn cold and made me shiver. Then I got fearfully hungry—coppers were given me, but no food did I get, and I felt I had had enough of the business. The boy’s pocket, too, was draughty—there was a hole in it—besides which I got the cramp. It wouldn’t have been much use trying to escape. Besides, the monkey idea was all wrong, for people were passing all the time, and, had they noticed a free monkey on the track of a catseye, a crowd would have collected, and perhaps that grinning idiot might have gone for me again. I couldn’t very well change to myself inside of his jacket, nor during a performance in public, as it might have attracted attention. So I was obliged to wait for my chance, which came at last when he picked up an end of a cigarette and after begging a match was busy lighting it at a sheltered corner. I was on the pavement in a minute, managed to slip out of my idiotic red coat to which the cord was attached, flung off that absurd hat, and remem-

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bering my first idea I changed into a cat, calmly sat down on the inner side of some area railings, and peered through to watch the fun."

"Yes, and what happened then?" interrupted Dulcie excitedly.

"Well, you never saw such a face as that boy's when he found the monkey's coat and hat on the ground without any monkey inside of them! He said some foreign words and commenced running about hunting for me everywhere, whilst I trotted off before his very eyes. Ha, ha, ha!"

His sister pealed with laughter and delight.

"As quickly as possible I reached the big house where I had seen the girl with the red hair go in after she had picked up my catseye."

"I saw her pick it up, too," broke in Dulcie.

But Cyril went on: "The windows were still open. I jumped up from the balcony on to a stone ledge, and then by good luck right into the bedroom of that bothersome young lady. She was reading a book. We did startle one another!"

"'Oh, you darling sweet pussikins!' she said. 'Ah,' I thought, 'not so darling as all that. And the next moment I was lifted clumsily on to her lap and stroked and patted, whilst I looked anxiously around for my catseye in the intervals—when she wasn't kissing my nose, which was disturbing and uncomfortable, and girls do like kissing

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so. Then I saw it gleaming on the dressing-table close to the window all the time, and I became impatient. The stupid baby language and kisses bothered me, so I stopped it by giving her face an ugly scratch."

"Oh, how rude!" exclaimed Dulcie, shocked.

"Whereupon she gave me an angry slap, which I didn't feel a bit through the fur, and pushed me down roughly on the floor, looked at her face in the glass, and then I heard her bathing it in the dressing-room. I say! had I changed then, wouldn't she have been jolly surprised to find a strange boy in there! So, remaining her darling pussikins," he continued with a smile, "I just jumped on the table, took hold of my catseye in my mouth, and escaped by the window before she returned, and waved my tail in good-bye—stupid things, tails!" With a laugh, which was echoed by Dulcie, Cyril, grown serious again, went on with his narrative:

"But just as I alighted on the ground a boy began shying stones at me, which it was awfully difficult to dodge. One of them caught me such a whack on the side, and he laughed and shouted 'Hurrah, got him!'—Wasn't I glad when I saw him just now!—Well, I was just going to change then, when there was a great barking, and a whole lot of dogs seemed to be bearing down on me. I

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thought I'd make myself scarce, so I tore off, and as they were on my track I simply cut. I flew along the muddy streets with the whole pack at my heels, with shouts and laughter ringing in my ears, scampering past them, past houses, past traffic, whizzing along for my life with the barking din and the pattering feet always following. At last, as a last hope, I dodged round, doubled back, the noise stopped, and I took refuge in a quiet garden, awfully puffed, and jumped on a seat next some one resting there."

"Me," said Dulcie, with a sigh of relief.

"Yes, I found it was you, Sis. I Wished, and you're a trump, for I was tired, and you rid me of that big dog." Duleie glowed with pride and pleasure at that. "I never knew, though, that that brute was following me. Fortunately for me he gripped hold of the bracelet round my neck."

"How well you tell a story, Cyril," she said simply.

Cyril smiled contentedly. "That's nothing."

Then she inquired anxiously: "Do you think it was the Wizard's trick, that losing of the stone?"

"P'raps," replied Cyril musingly. "He's quite ugly enough for anything. But I don't think so," he added reassuringly; "it must have been an accident—got loose, or something."

Dulcie's mind being eased, she then told her own story as a mole. She couldn't remember the

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Porcupine's verses exactly, but she repeated what she could, and they had a good laugh over them ;— before, she had been blind to the fun in them. “ I repeated them to Molly,” continued Dulcie, rippling over with fun, “ and she was so offended she vowed she'd never marry him. So I cured him of his vanity—and serve him right ! ”

“ But why did the Hedgehog titter ? That was what you wanted to find out, wasn't it ? ” asked Cyril.

“ I suppose it was expecting the Porcupine's verses.”

“ Suppose ? ”

“ I forgot to ask.”

Cyril expressed his opinion that she had been a softy, that those creatures weren't worth while chumming up with, and they couldn't have much sense, and it didn't matter, after all, what they thought or did.

“ I shan't tell you any more, then,” replied Dulcie, offended.

“ Yes, do,” begged Cyril, curious to know the end. So after he had begged three times, she gave way, and informed him she was glad never to have been born a mole, for Molly was in terribly low spirits and had apologised for them, but the reason was because all her family's skins had been taken off their backs in order to keep fashionable ladies

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from taking cold—as these ladies seemed to think that it was a prettier and warmer skin than their own. And Molly hourly expected each moment to be her last—and advised her new-found friend to prepare for the same fate—which was all very terrifying. “So I made haste to wish to be my own self again,” concluded Dulcie.

Cyril made her promise faithfully never again to run off like a mole or anything else, which—being only too anxious to avoid another separation—she willingly did.

“The poor animals,” she remarked earnestly, “all seem so helpless. There’s no one ever to take their part or help them.”

“Ah, you think that because we’ve not yet changed into something really great,” answered Cyril with conviction.

“What a gloomy looking place we’ve come to! I was so interested listening and talking, I didn’t notice the way we’ve come,” broke in his sister, gazing at what appeared like a Jungle in front of them. “Surprising how we got here, isn’t it?”

“I never noticed either, but it’ll do beautifully,” replied the boy, quite satisfied.

“But it doesn’t seem very nice to be a Beast,” argued Dulcie reflectively, her thoughts harking back; “somehow it’s so unpeaceful.”

“I tell you that’s because we haven’t tried

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anything great," repeated her brother with an emphatic movement of his hand and a decided toss of his head. " *If*," he said, and hesitated—" *if* we were lions " (he waited, then finding they were both as they were he went on, reassured), " then we would know what it is to rule everybody, keep our friends in order, and eat up our enemies."

" But I don't want to eat up any one," protested Dulcie. " I think it would be very disagreeable."

" I should think it must taste rather nice—*they* like it. Besides, one never knows till one tries," remarked her brother. " I want to be a *lion*!!"

At once the King of Beasts confronted Dulcie. With a shriek she tore away as fast as her small feet could scamper. Then she changed her mind. And as a lioness, full of courage, she rejoined him.

Grand beasts they were as they bounded into the Jungle with a mighty roar. Startled creatures hurried out of their path, and the very landscape appeared insignificant in their presence. Monarchs of all they surveyed! This at last was splendid freedom.

At a river, sparkling like glass in the burning sun, they stopped and slaked their thirst, lapping up the water greedily. Then they turned again into the tangle of vegetation and laid themselves down to rest.

Purring with delight in the hot sunshine, they

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lazily lashed their tails. The lion was just dozing when he was roused by something heavy and strong winding itself in great coils around his limbs and body. He gave forth a roar half of anger, half of fear. Struggle as he would he could not free himself; it was a huge boa-constrictor that was closing about him like bands of iron, and was just about to crush him to death when the lion disappeared and a little boy in a blue serge suit wriggled away, sobbing out: "Oh, Mother! Dulcie!"

Just then Cyril's eye caught sight of a rifle pointed from a neighbouring tree. To his horror it was aimed straight at the recumbent, lazily-blinking lioness. His heart stood still with terror. He could neither scream nor stir. Quite forgotten was the huge reptile, which had jerked back its head in astonishment at the remarkable disappearance of its quarry, with an undulating movement of surprise in that part of its anatomy which might be termed its neck. But now the creature was quite close to the lad and rearing itself up to strike at him when—crack! crack! crack! Bullets were whizzing all around. Cyril, bewildered, stumbled over the dead body of the reptile and fell to the ground. The next moment he felt Dulcie's hair over his face as she pulled him on to his feet.

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“Great snakes!” exclaimed Lord Algy. Captain Waring, who was eagerly peering through the branches of another tree close by, laughed as he rejoined, “Only one, my friend.”

“Eh, what? Well I’m—” drawled his lordship, craning his neck and letting his eyeglass drop and dangle—he had stopped short in his sentence, not seeming quite to realise what he was. “By Jove!” he now added, “I certainly thought I hit one of those two fine brutes; most remarkable thing I ever saw in my life.”

“*Didn’t* see, you mean, my dear Algy,” replied the Captain coolly and not without vexation. “*I’ve* seen a dead serpent before. Where have they moved to? that’s the question: we shall have to track them again. A dead snake in the grass is not worth two fine lions in the Jungle.”

“No, my dear fellow, I don’t think so either—I agree with you there—it’s quite the contrary, of course,” remarked his lordship with a certain amount of energy.

Meanwhile, Dulcie and Cyril, with white, scared faces, were fleeing hand in hand like pixies among the trees.

CHAPTER V

IN THE FISH-KING'S REALM

IT was only when they reached a meadow full of wild flowers, and the Twins, worn out with their long run, lay down to rest, that Dulcie remarked with a sigh of relief—

“ We never do seem to be so safe as when we are us ! ”

“ We won’t be Birds nor Beasts any more,” replied Cyril. “ Hark ! What’s that snoring so loud ? ”

“ It’s not snoring. I believe it’s the waves ! ” Saying which Dulcie jumped up and Cyril did the same. The children found the meadow they were in was on a cliff, and that below were far-reaching sands, and in the distance heaved the glorious deep blue sea.

They clapped their hands and danced with delight, and when that performance was over they carefully descended the steps cut in the face of the cliff which led down to the shore.

Very soon their shoes and stockings were slung round their necks, and they were running over the

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hot sand to where the wavelets came rippling to meet their little feet.

So immersed were they in paddling that it was a little time before they noticed some one sitting amongst the rocks which peeped out of the surface of the ocean a short distance away. A hand was beckoning to them, and thinking it might be some one who wanted help, Cyril declared he would go to the rescue, and began to wade towards the spot.

Dulcie, fearful of his going alone, and not wishing to be left behind in the adventure, hurried next to him. The current was rather strong and the water got deeper as they went; but they didn't think of their clothes (which were no longer wholly dry), but only of the rescue. When they reached the rocks they found to their surprise a very quaint figure calmly seated there, who motioned them in a very grand manner to a place on each side of him. "Pray be seated. Good morning!"

"Good morning!" exclaimed the visitors politely, taking the places indicated.

"Good afternoon!" said the Fish-King. "Do you mind holding my crown one moment, my dear?"

Dulcie took it with awe. He was a very fine gentleman indeed, and the two children couldn't

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help staring at him as he smoothed his hair in silence. He was short and stout, in a costume not unlike that of Harlequin in the pantomime, only the colouring was green and blue. His goggle green eyes and wide, down-drawn mouth made him look comically like a carp, whilst the pointed wisp of white beard on his chin and the four long white hairs he was winding round his bald head were not really an improvement to his appearance.

“Thank you kindly, my dear,” he said as he took his crown and put it on. It was beautifully made, entirely of the loveliest small shells, and when he wore it he looked every inch just what he happened to be.

In spite of his queer face, the two visitors felt quite at ease with him, and were sure that with such a pleasant voice, too, he must be very nice indeed.

“What are you King of?” inquired Dulcie with a friendly smile.

“Of the fish,” he answered, patting her cheek. “I’m right glad to see you.”

Suddenly remembering, the little couple at once donned their shoes and stockings as a sign of respect.

“It’s very healthy, I suppose,” remarked Dulcie, “living out at sea like this?”

“I suppose so, my lady,” answered the Fish-

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King drily. Dulcie liked being called "my lady." "Except," he continued thoughtfully, "for an occasional attack of shingles I don't ail much." Then turning to Cyril he asked: "How's that old rascal of a Wizard? laughing in his dressing-gown, eh?"

"I'm sorry I don't know, your Majesty," replied the boy, surprised at the question and the way it was put.

"You will soon get to know me. I only hope you may not be disappointed. You certainly wouldn't have been disappointed with my ancestor."

"Who's your ancestor?" asked Dulcie bluntly.
"Was he a King-fisher too?"

"Not at all. He was Neptune."

"Where did he live?"

"In Imagination."

"Where's that?"

Cyril raised his eyebrows at her lack of manners.

"You turn to the right," answered his Majesty patiently, with a gesture that way, "follow your nose, mount a hill north of the Fore Head, and there you are. See?"

The Twins couldn't think what answer to make—though he seemed to expect one—so they gave a little nervous laugh.

"Just see, there's a dear boy," said the Fish-

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King kindly, in order to change the subject—"just see if you've got a copy of the *Financial Market* about you, will you? Or maybe you know what the Financial Time is? That would do quite as well. Oh, beg pardon—I see you've no watch on; pawnbroken, eh?"

"I'm afraid I don't know what you mean; I've never heard of all that," admitted Cyril.

"But you *have* heard there's been another slump!"

"What?" ventured Dulcie.

"In what? Why, in Sea-weed, of course. Just my luck. Fishy transactions never do pay, though they always promise to. But," he added, rousing himself, dismal still, "you must both come down soon and have a cup of sea or something—it's my birthday, and there's going to be jinks below."

"Birthday! How delightful!" said Dulcie.

"Why, how old can you possibly be?" asked Cyril, "if it's not impolite to ask."

"Quite right. Let me see," said the Fish-King thoughtfully. "Ah, now I remember. I'm just several millions of years—it takes a little time to fix the number exactly—and eleven days."

"That *is* old, Sire," murmured Dulcie as she regained her breath, which had been taken away at the idea of so many birthdays.

"Old? Nonsense, my lady."

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“How can it be ‘and eleven days’ if it’s your birthday, your Worship?” asked Cyril, thinking he’d go one better than Sire.

“Because, my Philosopher, I prefer the new-fangled Calendar which puts one on eleven days; in that way, when I’m told I don’t look my age, I know it’s true, and not flattery. See?”

The children were not quite satisfied with the explanation. Nevertheless, they were pleased to find it the most natural thing in the world to be getting chummy with a Fish-King.

“Now, do come below waves and have a cup of sea or something,” he repeated, looking appealingly first at one and then at the other.

“Thank you very much,” replied his little guests. “But,” said the cautious Dulcie, “sha’n’t we be drownded?”

“You both have your catseyes on, I presume?” And his Majesty stared anxiously in their faces. “Yes, I see you have. Very well, then. Sit steady! Halloo there,” shouting downwards. “Lift, please!” Then muttering, “It’s high time we went,” he smiled. His smile was so unutterably comic that it was to a merry burst of childish laughter that all the rocks descended as quickly as the tide rose above them, and the trio, smiling still, found themselves gently deposited at the bottom of the Ocean.

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“Wonderful thing water pressure!” remarked the Fish-King. Then, helping them off the rocks, he added with a gracious wave of the hand, “Welcome to my Domain!” And the Twins bowed so prettily that he appeared much gratified.

“Ah!” he said, taking them by the hand and stopping still, “I see Fido. Fido, Fido!” At his call a fine dog-fish came forward at a fast swim; and its head was patted graciously, whilst its tail wagged with contentment. “Now,” resumed his Majesty, “we’ll go to the Revels;” and they proceeded at a smart walk as buoyantly through the clear water as through air.

The sea-scape was perfectly beautiful, but as the Fish-King once more seemed deep in melancholy, the Twins gazed silently around. They were evidently walking along the King’s Road, for it was wide enough to walk three abreast; the sand was so fine and glittering that it looked like gold dust; the path was bordered by exquisite shells. On either side were gardens of variegated anemones. Here and there an old sodden boot lay about untidily, at which the Fish-King frowned and looked uneasy. They passed oyster beds, where, besides oysters, all sorts of fish, large and small, were fast asleep, breathing heavily with their mouths wide open. Now and again a squadron of lobsters or jelly-fish would confront them, and respectfully

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divide and wait until the royal procession of three had passed through.

At last they came to a great object ahead which turned out to be a sunken ship, and the children heard the Fish-King say: "Welcome, my dears, to my home! I hope your visit to 'The Billows' will please you." They eagerly assured him it would, for they felt certain they were going to have a jolly time.

On board everything was most snug and trim; and in the large saloon he led his two little guests to one end of the long table, where they found biscuits, tinned meats, jam, and other nice things, which they enjoyed very much, whilst their host looked on with a satisfied expression.

"Now will you take a cup of something?" he asked—and seemed relieved when they declined with thanks. "I'm a seatotaller myself," he observed; "I don't drink like a fish, nor go in for cups."

"I'm glad we said 'No, thank you,'" whispered Dulcie to Cyril, who nodded assent. "Why are you so sad, Mr. Fish-King?" she asked when she had satisfied her hunger, and she stroked his great flabby hand.

He didn't answer for a moment, then trying to twist up his mouth into a smile he said as he roused himself: "I fear I'm somewhat glum for a birthday party, but I've had so many of them; besides, I'm



Its head was patted graciously

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bothered about the slump! One would think Seaweed safe enough for a vested interest, surely. From all accounts, they must have been cooked—softly, too, in the bargain! Can you make it out, my dears?"

The Twins couldn't understand it at all, and shook their heads quite emphatically over the matter.

"Now, let's go abaft," suggested his Majesty. He rose, and looked at them with a ray of cheerfulness. "We'll watch the Water Sports. I revel in them when they are good—usually they go bad."

The children readily agreed. "It's lucky you happened to come on my birthday," he continued, "for you may be amused. Here's a list of the different Courses," and he took up a Menu from the table: "they'll race through them like old boots!"

"Do they race better than new ones?" inquired Cyril.

"They've more experience," replied his Majesty. "What is about to begin," he said quite gaily as they followed him up the gangway, "is—let me see; ah yes—'Turtle Mocked.' Now just look at Fido"—he leaned over the side, the Twins did likewise. "He's turning turtle!" And the three watched with approval the antics of the dog-fish as he turned his somersaults; and they applauded this first item on the programme.

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“Next Innings!” shouted his Majesty. “Fish balls bowled,” he read from the Menu. And taking their plaice, a game of cricket began. “They think they can play,” he whispered, “and that is the way I humour them, or they might begin to cry, and I hate anything that reminds me of blubber. But how can any one in their senses imagine plaice fielding at slip? Why, they don’t know cricket from a bat—nor never will at this rate, I should think.”

“Once in London, we saw such a lot of fish in the big shops there,” volunteered Dulcie in a burst of confidence. The next moment she wished she hadn’t spoken, for Cyril was frowning at her and shaking his head. She glanced timidly at the Fish-King. He evidently didn’t mind, for he merely remarked with a sigh: “Ah dear! One of these days my poor subjects will be sucked from the sea through a 2d. tube, straight to Billingsgate—I suppose that’ll be the time for slumps and no mistake!”

“I suppress the Sole and Eel Course!” he cried suddenly. There was a great stir in the water at this intimation. “It’s a dance,” he muttered. “Let’s get on with the Cod Stakes.” He put down the Menu and threw overboard some nets and fishing tackle. Then began a highly amusing exhibition by old fish showing the young ones how to nibble the bait without taking the hook, and if taken by

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some mischance, how to get unhooked—how to avoid the nets, and other life-saving dodges which his Majesty explained to the astonished Twins.

But hardly had he finished when a fat young gurnet who was taking part in the sports did get hooked, and clumsily extricating himself went off leaving a thin red track behind him.

“The poor thing is hurt!” exclaimed Dulcie.

“Oh no,” said the King; “a herring-bone stitch is all that’s necessary.”

“I know how to do that,” replied Dulcie, “but I thought it was only used to make dress things look pretty; I never heard of it for mending fish.” The excitement continued unabated.

When the revels were over, the little strangers expressed their enjoyment of the birthday party, and thought perhaps they ought to be saying good-bye. Their kind host wouldn’t hear of their going yet—they hadn’t even seen the Cable which he was just going to visit.

“Who’s won the prizes?” asked Cyril as they got off the ship.

“I have,” replied his Majesty.

“Not the winners of the races and of the sports?” said the boy, in amazement.

“They can’t expect to win the races and win the prizes too. *I* have won the prizes.”

“What have you won, your Worship?”

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“I forget,” he answered vaguely. “I’ve won so many in all these years, and they get so mis-laid—for all the world like addled eggs!”

“But you’ve only just—” commenced Cyril.

“Don’t tease,” said Dulcie, pulling at her brother’s sleeve. And so the matter dropped.

Whilst Cyril and the Fish-King were talking about the price the crown might fetch were he obliged to part with it on account of his recent financial losses, Dulcie was so busy admiring the beautiful creatures swimming about, that she stumbled and fell before her companions could warn her that the Cable was lying in her path. She was soon up, and it was the Fish-King now who was lying prone on the ground, but his attitude was intentional; he was listening intently. At a sign from him they did likewise. The billows overhead were lashing up the spray, and through the rushing sound could be vaguely heard: “Number A. 1. Sea Power! Has that nice little venture proved successful, Sire?”

It was the Wizard’s voice. The Twins stared at one another with startled eyes.

“No, thou Cabalistic One,” shouted the Fish-King, and got up with an impatient sigh, so he didn’t hear what sounded like the echo of mocking laughter which the children recognised before they rejoined him. “Some one’s at the bottom of

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that business, I'll be bound," he grumbled. "I'm afraid I'm too green, and ye gods and little fishes alone know how I manage to be, for I've a fit of the blues often enough," and he glanced at the garment he wore. "Now come and inspect my Workhouse." He led them away in silence to a small lugger, also wrecked, commandeered by his Majesty.

"What a lot of residences you have, Sire," remarked Dulcie timidly, realising the situation.

"One must, if one is a royalty," he replied. "I have even more than the German Emperor. I've one for eating in. One for thinking in. One for not thinking in. And a host of others. There is one which takes me eighteen hours to reach, where I go at cradle time, where the waves hush me to sleep with their lullaby—you have heard it—'Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep,' eh?"

"Yes, yes," assented the Twins readily.

His glum face slightly relaxed, then he continued: "It's always a matter of interest to me when my ship comes home. I don't whistle for it; I squall for it. Look out for squalls, for I feel restless, and in my family carping is our form of humour."

Once inside the cabin of the lugger the Fish-King took an immense ruler, and sitting upon the table in front of a high heap of foolscap began ruling one wave after another. Absorbed

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in his occupation, his mouth tightly drawn down, he looked more than ever like a carp. He kept on ruling the waves, heeding neither the little coughs, the little fidgetings, or the little hints, entreaties, regrets, or excuses of the Twins, until, exasperated at his sudden and unaccountable oblivion to their existence, they murmured broken words of thanks for his past kindness, and, not a little indignant, they walked out of the cabin, jumped over the side of the ship, and swam upwards. They met many a quaint creature, and then diving below they rested in a quiet spot again amongst beautiful shells—at last in peaceful calmness at the bottom of the sea, alone with the heaving waves palpitating far above them.

Talking over the strange conduct of the Fish-King, it occurred to Cyril that the fact of parting from them risked reminding him of blubber, which he hated, as he had told them before, so he must have preferred ignoring them altogether, especially as he had work to do. But Dulcie thought perhaps they might see him again when he was not so busy.

“It must be rather jolly being a crowned head,” mused Cyril; “I vote we have a shy at another catseye, so as to have a gorgeous crown and boss everything and everybody.”

Dulcie, dazzled at such a magnificent prospect, readily agreed.

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“I wish I were a crowned head!” exclaimed Cyril excitedly.

“I wish I were a crowned head!” repeated Dulcie with fervour.

They stared at one another. No change had



They met many a quaint creature

come. Dulcie was the first to understand their failure.

“Of course not,” she remarked. “How stupid of us! It’s a Bird, Beast, or Fish we have to choose, not a crowned head!”

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So her brother, to change the subject, drew her attention to an eel that was trying to turn head over wriggling in a very upside down fashion. Tired of watching it, they lay chest downwards, and, supporting themselves on their elbows, kicked up their own heels.

“ Do you believe there is such a thing as a Sea-serpent, little Sis ? ” inquired Cyril lazily.

“ I believe there are sometimes, when they are in season.”

“ Well, I can tell you there are *not*. And the only season they *are* in is the Silly Season. Father says so.”

“ It’s so lovely down here, and you’re spoiling it all, Cyril, by arguing. I do think it would be nice,” she added, glancing round, “ to be an oyster and have a real pearl ! I wished I possessed a real pearl ! ”

“ Shut up,” cried Cyril. But to his annoyance he found his sister already gone, and a stupid-looking, closed-up oyster in her place, out of which he could not get a glimmer of satisfaction.

“ You *have* shut up and no mistake ! ” he said severely, “ in the middle of a conversation too.” However, she was soon at his side again, and looked very sorry.

“ Well, what was it like ? ” was his laconic welcome, accompanied by a glance of disapproval.

“ Not at all nice. I didn’t want to remain—

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although I possessed a magnificent pearl. I felt so horribly ill—as though I had some dreadful disease. What a life pearl-oysters must have if they feel like that!"

"I've heard pearls *is* a disease."

"Then how horrid of you to let me have it. You ought to have told me."

"How could I? You were in such a hurry. I couldn't do anything. You were just the same over that wretched mole. I do wish you wouldn't go off like that again; you know you promised you wouldn't."

"I forgot. But it's the Wishes that go off so quick."

"I say! Where was your bracelet, Dulcie, when you were an oyster?"

"Don't know," she answered, pondering. "I 'spose it must have melted. Oh yes, of course I remember—it had grown very small, and formed a sort of little boundary all round me inside my shell; it's here all right now. I can't think—let me see, what were we talking about before I went away? There was something I was going to tell you. What *were* we talking about, Cyril?"

"Sea-serpents."

"Oh yes. Well, I was going to tell you, there must be Sea-serpents, 'cos you remember it being in the papers and our seeing a picture of one."

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“ But that was all stuff and nonsense.”

“ No it wasn’t.”

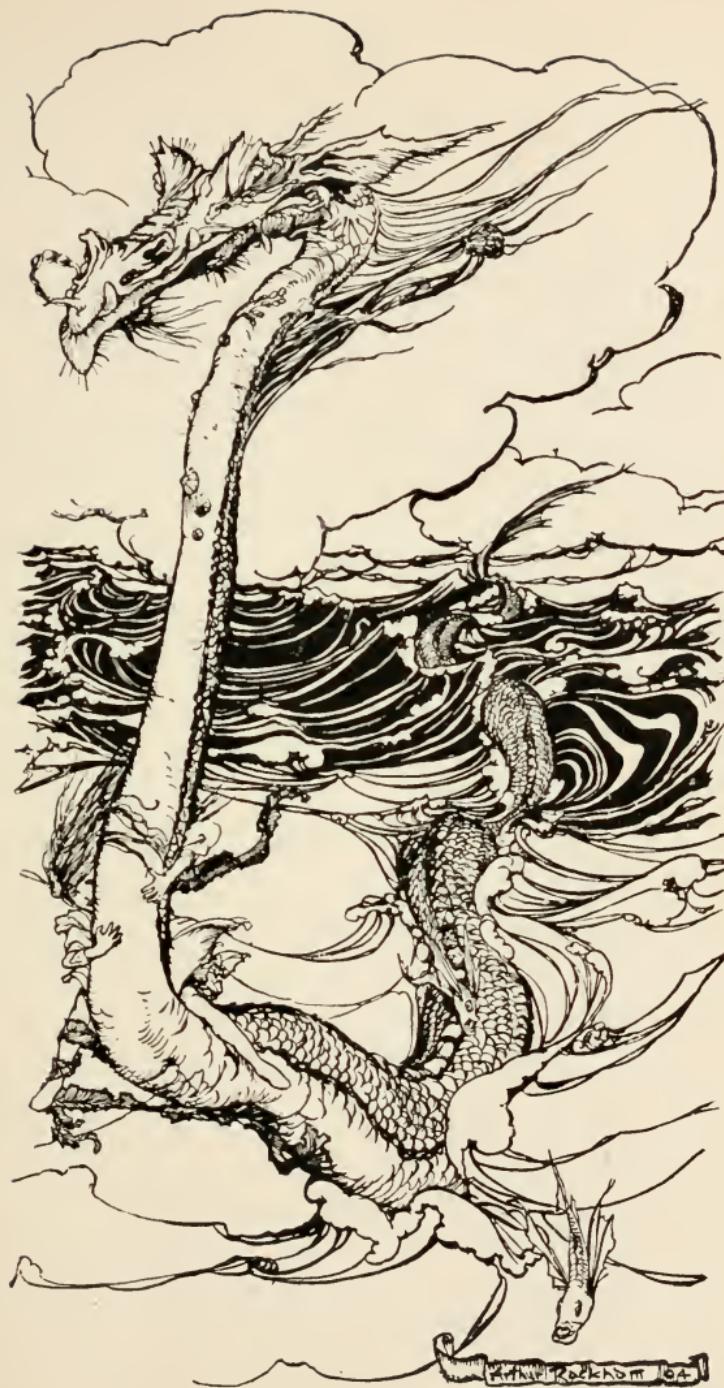
“ Well, look here, we’ll soon find out, little Duffer. I wish I were a Sea-serpent !”

“ I’m not a Duffer, after all,” was Dulcie’s first thought as Cyril vanished into what looked like the end of a wriggling tail—a tail so long that it stretched right out of view, and she realised this must be part of her own brother. It was slowly moving away.

“ Don’t go and leave me,” she cried appealingly, clutching hold of the great scaly thing. But it moved quicker, dragging her along. So, in her anxiety she clambered on top of it, sat down, and found to her surprise that its undulating movement of progress formed a regular switchback, and that she was travelling along its back towards its head in a most pleasant and delightful manner.

“ What a funny thing to happen !” And she laughed. “ But whatever will occur when I get to the end ! And what yards and yards of him there seem to be !”

All this she wondered and heaps more, till at last she saw the creature’s huge neck looming high up in front of her ; when she got there it stopped her progress. It turned its head round—which resembled that of a giraffe—and its mild eyes looked kindly at her ; and what was most comic, yet comforting, it wore a nose-ring of gold set with catseyes.



What a glorious ride that was!

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She patted its neck affectionately ; and then with a mighty glide of long duration the huge creature took her up, up, until, with her still on its back, gracefully reclining against its neck, the Sea-serpent arose with her above the surface of the Ocean.

Certainly, no one now would have taken them for twins.

What a glorious ride that was ! Nothing around but the wild surging spray, the wind blowing in her face, brightening her cheeks, and tossing her fair hair about. Above, the clouds, dark and heavy, tore along—everywhere movement, reckless, turbulent movement.

What a wild ride it was !

Far, far in the distance appeared a dark speck. As it came nearer it turned out to be a ship with broken mast, broken by the waves which leaped over its deck again and again. People were on it, for shouts came from it borne along on the wind.

A fearful squall arose as from the very bosom of the Ocean. Lightning played around the doomed ship. Half blinded by it, and bewildered by the deafening noise of thunder, Dulcie just caught a glimpse of the Fish-King in the water near, before burying her face in her hands to escape the blinding glare of the second flash. Starting suddenly at the terrifying clap of thunder that followed, she lost her balance and fell off the Sea-serpent's back

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headlong into the surging waters. For some time she was tossed about, sometimes swimming, sometimes floating, enjoying the excitement of the thing, knowing she couldn't drown, and expecting every moment to see something of her huge brother, when all of a sudden she found herself right in the middle of a shoal of fish.

She was startled to find, too, that like them, she had been caught in a large net from which, swim and search as she would, she could find no means of escape. Restlessly with her fellow-captives she turned this way and that in vain hope of freedom. She knew she must be adding to the salt water around, for she felt so miserably helpless and lonely, and a heavy sob now and again escaped her. Here indeed was a lack of freedom and no mistake, for the poor fish as well as for herself! Never, never again, she said to herself, would she beg for fish for tea if this was what they had to endure. Round and round inside the net she swam, backwards, forwards, upwards, downwards—no outlet was there. If only she could find the way she got in! The thread was so hard and strong, too, that she could do nothing, tear at it with her little hands as she would. She had nothing sharp about her either, not even a pin.

The sea became calmer by degrees, but Dulcie's anxiety grew, and her impatience with it, till the

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sound of men's voices from above raised her excitement to fever pitch.

"Oh dear, oh dear! It must be the fisher people!" And the thought that the little swimming creatures darting about in terrified jerks would soon be motionless for ever, helped to increase her distress.

"Hold hard, Bill. Ain't it heavy!" said a gruff voice.

"My missus won't be sorry," answered his mate.

The net was actually being hauled up, and Dulcie, beating against it with her arms and struggling hard, was being hauled up with it.

Her sleeve had got rucked up—the catseyes glistened.

"I wish—oh what? I can't think—to be something very small indeed—oh quick!"

No change occurred. She could now see the boat and the men's stooping figures.

"Oh please, I want to change—I want to be one of—no, I forgot, they can't get out either—I wish I were a—a—"

"Holy St. Patrick!"

"Bless me, what's that?" exclaimed both men, glancing down at her.

"—A periwinkle!" gasped Dulcie faintly.

The next second the little girl disappeared from their view and the fishermen rubbed their eyes and

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stared at one another with their mouths open. The big fishes and little were quick to seize that golden opportunity of their captors' careless handling of the net—and escaped, down to every jack sprat of them. And with the gentle murmur of the sea there mingled noisy and ugly words of baffled hope and disappointment.

CHAPTER VI

THE MYSTERY OF THE CRAB

AT the base of that Cliff where the wild flowers grew, the golden sands were still bathed in hot sunshine, and roughly caressed by the incoming waves. Upon the crest of one of these a Periwinkle was borne, and tossed, and flung, until it was landed high and wet on a soft bed of seaweed. But not for long—for very soon a little girl arose from that bed of seaweed, smoothed back her clinging hair, and cried out with joy as she recognised her surroundings. It was Dulcie, glad to be herself once more, and on the same beautiful sands again ; and her first thought was of course for Cyril.

She was dripping wet. To wipe her face she took out her handkerchief, which of course was wet also. In order to dry it she tied it to a piece of stick ; thus it could serve as a flag, too, which she could wave to attract Cyril if he were about that coast, and show him where she was.

Remembering that, according to some wise-heads, sea water kindly gives no chills, she had no

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fear for herself; so she lay down upon a patch of nice warm pebbles, of which she took a handful, and began idly throwing them one by one into the tide, which was running up to her feet faster than it retreated at the ebbing of the waves.

She was beginning to tire of this pastime when—plash! the last stone she threw fell plump into a sandy pool, out of which there hurried an enormous Crab. Dulcie was frightened, for the ugly creature had espied his disturber and was coming towards her at a quick amble, sideways. She turned and fled towards the Cliff, and a turn of the head showed her that her dreadful pursuer was not far behind. Up the arduous steps she climbed, stumbling every now and again in her hurry and excitement—those steps down which she had tripped so gaily with her brother. Again she turned to look behind her, this time with a feeling that here she must be safe.

But the great Crab was coming up the steps too.Flushed and gasping, she arrived at last on top of the Cliff amongst the wild flowers once more.

There, too, over the top appeared the terrifying creature. It was seemingly quite fresh, and was gaining rapidly upon her, for now she was quite tired out.

She could run no more. So poor Dulcie turned, and facing her pursuer, she cried—

ADVENTURES IN WIZARD-LAND

“ Oh, please, please go away—oh *do, please!* ”

But the ugly Crab never lessened its pace one bit ; it came nearer and nearer—so close that she could notice how it was shaking all over ; and how repulsive—till—till she saw that it was wearing something glittering around its body—a band of gold with one last catseye and the others all gone. It *must* be Cyril. Why didn’t he change ? Dulcie couldn’t imagine. The creature stopped motionless, and tears were dropping from its ugly eyes.

“ What can be wrong ? ” cried Dulcie with a sob of horror and fear. But she conquered her fear now that she was persuaded it was Cyril, and she approached still closer. She stroked it—actually stroked it—and although it was just a great horrid Crab the expression it wore was heart-rending.

“ It’s the Wizard’s trick ! ” she exclaimed suddenly. “ Poor Cyril’s last catseye won’t work ! ” She never thought how many *she* still had, for she was weeping bitterly over her brother in this dreadful guise, and she could hardly wonder what the end would be, if this indeed were not the horrible end of all.

“ Oh, Cyril,” she sobbed, addressing it. “ Oh, Cyril, how dreadfully changed you are ! Who-ever heard of having a crab for one’s brother

THE RAINBOW BOOK

If only we had remained Twins all this never could have happened!" And she walked round and round it, wringing her hands in despair. But evidently the poor quaking thing was powerless to give a shred of comfort, and its whole appearance was helpless and hopeless in the extreme.

"It's no use stopping here like this," she decided at last; "we'd better go on," and not quite thinking what she was doing, she whistled to it, as she whistled to Towzer, and they moved slowly forward—Dulcie, red-eyed and dejected, and the Crab following her at a side-way amble.

The strange pair had not proceeded far when Dulcie musingly muttered—

"I wish I were a crab too, then of course I should know all that has happened!"

Strange to relate, she didn't turn into a crab, but remained a little girl as usual. She might have sought the reason of this had not a sight arrested her attention which caused her to run forward with a cry of joy. It was the sudden appearance of the Bird-Fairy, in whose outstretched hand there glistened a jewel—a catseye; but how different was its gleam to the one the poor Crab wore. "Take it," she said hurriedly in her pretty soft voice—"and listen: I have wrested it from the Wizard, whose magnetic power succeeded in recovering one unused, though he had tried for several."



She stroked it—actually stroked it

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ADVENTURES IN WIZARD-LAND

“Why did he do it?” interrupted Dulcie innocently.

“Because he wanted to confuse me, and also to add one more to his dreadful Zoological Collection. Now replace the stone quickly and give me the sham one—for it belongs to the red-haired young lady, and is stolen property.”

The child busily and anxiously obeyed her directions.

“Stolen property?” repeated Dulcie in surprise.

But the Bird-Fairy had flown away and disappeared. The Crab had disappeared too. Cyril stood before her, white and trembling, and the next second his little sister was safe and snug in his arms.

For some time the Twins sat silent, huddled close together on the variegated carpet of clover, and cowslips, and poppies, and bluebells.

“That *was* awful!” exclaimed Dulcie at last. Cyril shivered.

“You saw the Bird-Fairy; did you hear what she said?”

“Yes, I understood what she said—I ‘spose I understood ‘cos she’s a Fairy.”

“Well, what do you think of it, Cyril?”

“I dunno; floors me completely. All I know is that I shouldn’t like to go through that scare again.”

THE RAINBOW BOOK

“ It was very kind of her, wasn’t it ? ”

The boy nodded thoughtfully and answered—

“ Yes, and I wonder why she did it ! ”

Now Dulcie thought of it, he looked quite dry. She felt his knees, according to her custom, after his being out in the rain—he certainly was quite dry. She said how surprised she was that he should be so.

“ How did you manage it after being in the pool ? ” she asked.

“ It must be running in the sun,” he explained.

It had done the same for her, and her serge frock was none the worse for the sea water. By degrees they cheered up. They were so happy to be together again on that lovely Cliff, with the sea beyond sparkling so cheerfully in the bright light as though it wanted to share in their renewed gaiety.

“ Cyril,” said Dulcie, “ I’m longing to hear what happened to you when we were parted so suddenly in the Ocean during that awful storm.”

“ All right,” replied Cyril promptly. “ When I looked round and found you were not on my serpentine back, I didn’t know where I was when you went overboard, and therefore didn’t know a bit where to search for you. I changed into a crab so as to move about in a small space and more easily for the purpose. I dodged the nets

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which were about—I had learned the lesson we saw given during those sports——”

“I wish I had paid more attention,” sighed Dulcie.

“And was washed ashore,” continued her brother, not heeding the interruption, “right into that pool where stones came whizzing around; it was rather beastly. I’m getting used to have stones shied at me, but that last one was the best aimed, and caught me a good crack on the back of my shell and nearly startled me out of it; it quite startled me out of the water. At the same moment I caught a glimpse of your hand-kerchief with the blue border, and of you racing off full pelt. I wished to change to myself—nothing happened. I couldn’t make it out. I wished till I was red all over. Still nothing—nothing. Then I had an awful feeling that it was hopeless and I was in the Wizard’s power.”

“Poor Cyril!”

“Then I tore after you, shaking with fright as much as you were. I thought you were too frightened to look at me; and that you’d never do so and never recognise me.”

“But I did!”

“And you saved me, dear little Sis!” Cyril had grown quite pink in the face, and was trying to keep back unmanly tears.

THE RAINBOW BOOK

“Did you, too, see the Fish-King during the storm?” she interrupted, to change the subject.

“Yes. But he didn’t get that ship he was after, for I stuck my huge self between him and it, and switchbacked myself when he clung to me, like one of those bucking horses, so he had no chance.”

“Did he recognise you, do you think?”

“How could he? I didn’t look much like the Philosopher he knew.”

“How about that ship?”

“I was glad to see it right itself and drift away; the cries stopped, and the passengers pointed in my direction so excitedly.”

“Perhaps they were grateful,” suggested his sister.

“Or perhaps they thought it was I who had caused them to toss.”

“But our host—it was scarcely fair to him.”

“He didn’t seem to mind. He simply dived down and disappeared.”

“Now, those people,” said Dulcie, “if you saw them, they must have seen you, and therefore”—with a wise look—“therefore they are sure to put you in the newspapers.”

“What a lark!”

“And people who read about it are sure not to believe there was seen a real live Sea-serpent, and wearing a nose-ring, too! And then I s’pose they’ll

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all be duffers, eh, Cyril? And it'll be called the Silly Season!"

Dulcie laughed, and Cyril laughed too, but something out at sea just then caught his eye. He jumped up excitedly and began waving his arms about frantically.

"Look! look!" he shouted.

Dulcie, kneeling by his side and shading her eyes with her hand, saw that old clump of rocks again, and upon them stood his Majesty the Fish-King waving his crown at them. The tide rose higher and higher. He made three low bows in their direction—Dulcie fluttered her handkerchief and curtsied, Cyril bowed his best—the Fish-King made a final gesture of farewell, the Twins kissed their hands; his Majesty put his crown firmly on his head with a smack, and disappeared with the rocks beneath the surging spray. And they felt they would never see him more.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAGIC BRACELETS

“ How nice it is to be one’s very own self again ! ” observed Dulcie contentedly. “ I don’t think I told you, Cyril, that a star-fish stared so rudely at me and said something about ‘ a Winking, Blinking, silly Periwinkle,’ which upset me very much at the time, but now it does seem absurd,” and she laughed. Then she told of her escape from the net, and Cyril got very excited at her imprisonment within it, remarking it was a jolly good thing *her* last catseye had proved all right or she would have remained a Periwinkle for ever.

“ Oh, Cyril ! ” she exclaimed, catching her breath, “ I never thought of that—was it my last ? That idea never came to me in the net ; I never thought at the time to see how many were left. Why ! Wherever is my bracelet ! ”

“ I say ! Where’s mine ? ” cried Cyril.

THE MAGIC BRACELETS WERE GONE.

The children looked at one another, aghast.

“ I remember now,” she exclaimed in awe-struck tones, “ wishing to be a crab so as to keep you

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company, and know the mystery, and I was too miserable to think about the real Wishes—and never noticed or thought about not having changed—and oh ! if *I* had happened to have one catseye only, *I* should have changed into a horrid crab and remained one for really ever and ever ! ”

“ Oh, bother. What’s the good of going on like that, Sis ? ” said her brother impatiently, for her voice verged very near a whimper. “ Much better smile and thank your stars you’re only a girl. Now what shall we do ? You suggest something, Dulcie.”

“ Go home,” was her prompt reply, wistfully and not without anxiety.

“ Yes, but it’s all very well to say ‘ Go home ’ ; the only way back must be the way we came, and you know what that means ; even if we can find it.”

From Dulcie’s looks she evidently didn’t relish the prospect. The very idea of the Wizard made her tremble.

“ I must say,” continued her brother, “ I don’t know how we’re going to manage it. We can’t, so *he* said, cross the Brook—and you could see he meant it. So it’s impossible, unless we roam about till we grow older, and then we shouldn’t know the exact date when we leave off being children under ten.”

“ We shouldn’t know the date at all,” said Dulcie disconsolately ; “ we don’t even know what time it is now.”

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“It feels like tea-time,” remarked Cyril.

“Oh no, the sun’s too hot for that.”

“Let’s go through our changes and see if we can make it all out,” said Cyril; “that’s the first thing to do.”

They went carefully through their various experiences from the beginning.

“I counted there were ten in each bracelet, so we ought each to have five catseyes left, instead of none and no bracelets at all!” he concluded miserably. And they were both full of trouble. But soon, Dulcie exclaimed—

“Why, we *are* Billies! We must count five more for getting back each time into our own shapes.”

Of course, there had been the mistake, and the fact being brought to light proved a great relief.

“Still,” said Cyril, “we ought to have been more careful, and saved two for the end; then we could have crossed the Brook as animals or something and taken our own shapes again on the other side, as we’d made up our minds to do.”

“Ah, but perhaps we shouldn’t have had the power on the other side,” remarked his sister.

That was a new view of the case. The children were perplexed.

“Anyway, we’re in a nice fix,” replied Cyril.

Then they decided it was no use stopping there,

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especially as Cyril said he wanted his tea badly—so the only thing was to find their way back, and try and dodge the Wizard if they could. They wandered off, not particularly hopeful, and very nervous. Cyril thought he should know the way once they found the Bird-Fairy's glade. Dulcie took his arm, and they walked on in silence, which she broke at last.

“I wish some one would come and take care of us !”

“I wish some one would bring me my tea !” said her brother.

“I wish some one would come and tell us what to do !” sighed Dulcie, who had begun to find out that it was of no use relying absolutely on Cyril any more. “If only we were at home !”

“I'll try to take you there, so cheer up, do,” answered the boy sturdily.

The sea breezes were gone. The Twins had reached the Jungle. To give themselves courage he whistled “Rule Britannia” and she hummed it, but held his arm very tight, and every now and then looked furtively around. There was no sight or sound of anything living. Nevertheless, they hurried on, until they broke into a smart run, and ran, and ran. . . . They halted abruptly. Cyril hadn't the slightest idea whereabouts they were, or which direction to take. It was no use asking

THE RAINBOW BOOK

Dulcie if she remembered ; she only shook her head disconsolately. When they fled from the Jungle before, they had been far too scared to notice anything at all in the way of landmarks.

“ We’ve got to get out of this and reach the Town,” observed the boy thoughtfully ; “ and then we’ve got to get to the back of the cave.”

“ But, Cyril, you’ve forgotten that after the Town comes the Wood, and then that horrid place.”

“ So I have. Well, it’s quite impossible, that’s all—out and out impossible.” His face was growing very red.

“ Don’t you remember, Cyril, my saying how gloomy this place looked when we entered it the first time ? Well, it looks gloomy enough here for anything, so it may turn out all right, and after all, we may be near to where we entered. Come along—it really does seem brighter over there. The Town may be quite close.”

It certainly was brighter beyond. But no streets were there. Instead, to their bewilderment, the little travellers found themselves already in the daisy glade once more. They were positively in the beautiful Wood again. The first object that caught their eye was something white. It was Cyril’s lost handkerchief which Dulcie picked up—it was a brand new one—and tucked it in his pocket at once.

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“I say, isn’t it curious how I’ve brought you back so easily ?” remarked her brother.

“It must be some short cut you found—by accident,” replied his sister decisively. And that settled that. In the absolute silence which had reigned around, a peculiar rustling now attracted their attention. Dulcie hung back, and Cyril held her hand as he advanced cautiously. They came to a sudden standstill as, from a clump of trees, a tall figure in a yellow satin gown emerged and confronted them.

“Pray walk in !” said the Wizard, and taking the boy and girl by a hand he led them—not through the Wood and along the country road—but somehow straight through the back entrance into his Cave Dwelling.

“I’m so pleased to see you again,” remarked their host, smiling as he took off his spectacles and scratched his nose with them. “I see you’ve not found freedom yet ! Ha, ha ! Pray make yourselves quite at home.”

Out of his satchel he drew forth the two bracelets in which were no catseyes.

“Used them quite all, I see !” he remarked blandly. “These others, poor things, thought they could change back the other side of my domain !” And the Wizard laughed most unpleasantly loud—just like his knocker.

THE RAINBOW BOOK

“ Please, sir,” ventured Dulcie coaxingly after his hilarity was over—“ please, sir, do let us go home.”

“ But your brother—I’m sure he wouldn’t be satisfied.”

“ Indeed I would,” said Cyril.

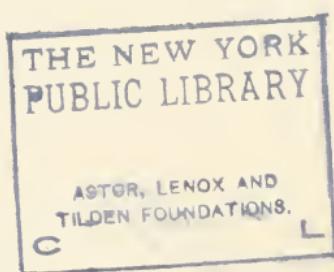
“ Tush ! Nonsense !” exclaimed the Wizard. “ *I* never say ‘Don’t’ here—so you are going to live with me and be oh so happy and free ! free to do every-thing I tell you. You would have been more useful as a Crab. But now you shall *both* tend my little Zoological Collection—they are not always so still, oh no ! You shall help me do my tricks. You shall help me ruin that fishy old King ; and help me keep that Bird-Fairy in order till she shall rue the day that she ever tried to——”

The Twins heard no more. Locked in one another’s arms they had suddenly sunk down in placid slumber. The astonished Wizard stopped in his flow of eloquence. He walked round and round them. His face grew blacker and blacker, whilst the Twins slept calmly on, Dulcie’s head resting peacefully on Cyril’s shoulder.

“ Well I’m blessed !” muttered the Wizard, “ or should be if I weren’t so . . .”



Taking the boy and girl by a hand, he led them



CHAPTER VIII

THE SPELL—AND HOW IT WORKED

THE poor children felt as though they had come under some gentle influence, and curiously enough, though outwardly asleep, they were conscious of the Wizard walking around them, pushing and pinching them, which somehow they never felt; and they were conscious, too, that he was troubled about something. What it was they couldn't imagine. He began to mutter threats coupled with the name of the Bird-Fairy.

The Wizard was clearly not at all happy. Indeed, he was profoundly concerned—for every time he touched the children to wake them, a sensation of cold spread over his hands which became rapidly more and more acute until it felt like touching fire, and he shrank back muttering and grumbling.

At that moment there was a great rush of air. The Bird-Fairy appeared, and with outspread wings she stood over the resting children, and, full of pity, she gazed down at them. Then they knew they were in her care, and they knew, too, that *they knew something which might prove useful and precious.* And they smiled happily as they lay there.

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“What do you want here?” demanded the Wizard harshly. “How dare you come here and try to thwart me?”

“I have come to pray you to turn from your evil ways. Let these poor children go,” begged the Bird-Fairy in tones sweet and pleading. “They have realised how much their happy home means to them and the safety there is in being taken care of. Let them go back to it.”

“Tush! Nonsense! What’s all that to me? Begone while I let you! I’m in no mood to be trifled with.”

“Show kindness and mercy for once,” was her reply.

“What? Go! You remain to mock me? Remember my little Zoological Collection. Which of us triumphed throughout?”

“Don’t boast of that.”

“But there is much to boast about. And my experiments have not stood still since that remote period. Science has progressed!”

“You will not be merciful?”

A scornful laugh was all the reply he vouchsafed.

“Then know,” she continued solemnly, “that our Fairy Enchantments have also strengthened with time.”

“Is it to be another tussle between us?” inquired the Wizard, smiling.

“It is. And I pray it may be for the last time.

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I have failed before. But this time I am going to succeed. With the girl my difficulty was not so great, but the boy has been hard to convince that other creatures have troubles greater than his. Others have returned to you through your craft, but this little couple you were forced to go and meet. You sought to entrap the boy as a Crab—it was I who restored the gem and saved him, as you may have guessed. And with that success the Bird-Fairy's hour now has come! You have failed to snare them as Bird, Beast, or Fish—your science can change mortals to nothing else. And now you shall fail to turn them to slaves."

Again the Wizard's discordant laughter was heard, and he said—

" You certainly got hold of that gem, my dear—and you evidently consider yourself in consequence an apt pupil of that old Fairy who befriended you—worse luck to her! had she but passed a moment later there would have been no time to frustrate me. My science would have been powerful enough to change you into a mere Bird. My Collection would have been the more valuable, and she could not have made you into a Fairy besides; nor would you have known enchanting arts with power to torment me; nor would you have had any hope of future freedom."

The Wizard paused a moment, then rasped out—

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“Were it not for your own salvation perhaps you wouldn’t be so ready to help the children, and to dare attempt to triumph over me. But we shall see what progress we have both made !”

“We shall see !” she repeated. “Touch these dear children if you can. You find it difficult ? You do not understand it, eh ?”

The Wizard, with a groan of pain, had leapt back after another attempt.

“I soon shall understand it,” he cried angrily, taking up a bottle containing a green fluid, a few drops of which he poured into his palms, then smiled. “This will wake them quickly enough, and probably never let them sleep again.”

But the only result was a louder cry of pain from him and a peaceful snore from them.

The Bird-Fairy looked steadily at him, and the Wizard trembled with anger and fear. Recovering himself he muttered : “You’ve got them well under your wing. So it must be with you I have to deal first. Ah, ha ! I’ll show you how Science can outdo your paltry old-fashioned arts !”

Thereupon he took a curious box-shaped mechanism, pointed it at the Bird-Fairy, pressed a spring, and instantly the pretty trio became enveloped in a halo of rainbow. The next moment the wings of the Bird-Fairy drooped, and the children awoke. Her Spell was broken !

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He moved his terrible invention slightly, so that she alone was encircled by the rainbow ray. She stood there motionless like a beautiful statue; and the Bird-Fairy was in the Wizard's power!

A few moments more and his triumph would be



The wizard, with a groan of pain, had leapt back

supreme and everlasting. She would exist no more. His evil heart thumped with excitement and glee.

A continuous and regular movement around the cave, and an underground heaving and low, distant rumbling arrested the Wizard's attention.

THE RAINBOW BOOK

He gasped and started, and the instrument he held fell from his grasp and shivered to atoms.

The Twins were the cause. It was they who had started the commotion. Unobserved by the Wizard in his moment of exultation, freed by him from the Bird-Fairy's Spell, they were free to follow the irresistible inclination they felt when they were under it. So they gently stroked each of the animals around, and were charmed to find that as they did so each poor creature changed to girl or boy and vanished from its prison, whilst the ground trembled and the rumbling became louder and louder, as though some unseen power was helping in the rescue. So quickly did they run round on their task that at the moment when the Wizard realised his mishap, just as he thought he had triumphed, Dulcie and Cyril had done their work. They started as they saw the Wizard lying full length on the ground next to his shattered invention, the rays of which were let loose and playing like lightning all round him.

Then they remained rooted to the spot with amazement, for just beyond was the Bird-Fairy, who before their astonished gaze became suddenly bereft of her wings and covering of feathers, and now stood before them as a lovely Princess, in draperies of silver tissue, and with a golden circlet upon her dark hair. A happy smile was on her

ADVENTURES IN WIZARD-LAND

face, as with a farewell gesture she motioned the children away.

'There was a terrific noise as of a thunder-clap.



Lying full length on the ground next to his shattered invention

They looked back. Nothing but a dark cloud was there !

“ Come quick ! ” cried Dulcie, taking Cyril’s hand and running off with him ; “ there’s no shelter here. Let’s get in before the rain.”

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And away they sped from the rocks on which they had so often played, reached home, ran indoors, and got upstairs just before the big drops turned into a heavy downpour and came pattering against the nursery window-pane.

“Are you children ready?” called up their mother in her kind, cheery voice. “Come down and have tea with me for a treat.”

It was a welcome invitation. They were quick to shout their thanks and to make themselves tidy. When they entered the parlour, where the sun was peeping in again after his absence, their mother said quietly—

“I’m glad you’ve escaped the storm.”

Later on, they all three sat in the gathering twilight at the large bow-window watching Nature going to sleep. The two children sat up very late that night—and they told their mother such an extraordinary story that she wondered how ever it could have got into their heads; and wondered where they could have read it. But they knew they hadn’t read it.

“Look at the bump on Cyril’s forehead!” exclaimed Dulcie, as conclusive evidence of the fight. But their mother only shook her head. Cyril often wore such marks of battle.

“And, little Mother, we *are* so glad to be at home.” She laughed. But they meant it.

THE OLD-FANGLED FATHER AND HIS NEW-FANGLED SONS

CENTURIES ago, an old father—as old as one of them—lay on his couch feeling that his end was near. He was not surprised; in fact, he had foreseen it as he had foreseen many other events. And he was reputed wise beyond his years, and therefore far beyond those of the people who reputed it.

So he called softly to him his three sons. They didn't hear him, being busy in different parts of the house; and it never occurred to him to ring the bell, because he was so old-fangled. He shouted to them, and they came.

“I have three things to say to you,” remarked the father solemnly.

The sons fidgeted visibly; they had been studying, were not at home to any one, and particularly had not wished to be disturbed in their work. They thought that their father was going to begin another anecdote, and it put them out of humour; but they were startled when he said—

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“ My sons, my end is near.”

Each one replied with an endearing term—just one, for they were not men of many words. And they told him “ it was only his fuss.” That he was “ only a hundred, and didn’t look as if he were going to be cut off prematurely.” “ That he mustn’t give in and should never say ‘ die.’ ”

“ I cannot argue the point,” replied the old man. “ Let me tell you my last wishes as briefly as I can, for my time is short.”

They tried to dissuade him from talking so much, but it was of no avail, for he protested that it was their duty to listen to him, and he insisted upon having last wishes as he had read that others had had before him, and it would be for the sons to obey and unravel them as best they could.

Then the father, addressing the eldest, who was ambitious and already past middle age, spoke as follows :—

“ My son, my first-born, find out the furthest-most summit of the world, and when you have surmounted that, you can surmount anything.”

To his second son, who was avaricious and also getting old and rather bald, he said :—

“ Sit patiently, and wait, and when you can hear a voice that comes from no living throat, and can see its traces, you will want for nothing.”

THE OLD-FANGLED FATHER

To the third son, and consequently his favourite, who was romantic, being better looking and naturally younger than his elder brothers, the father spoke thus :—

“ You, my son, who are the pride of my heart, the joy of my life, the light of mine eyes, search the atmosphere till at your bidding it showers down burning stars ; then shall you go to the beautiful Princess who awaits you, and live without labour.”

And the three brothers murmured under their breath :—

“ Poor old dad ! He’s certainly very unwell.”

But he had not yet finished.

“ Try to realise your ambition, my sons,” he continued. “ I have shown you the ways you should go. Then, and only then, will you have earned that priceless jewel—Contentment.”

The old man then composed himself comfortably, and died a few years later, after a sharp attack of senile decay, leaving many regrets and unsettled accounts behind him.

When that happened the three sons were very sad all day and all night. The very next morning they called to mind his last wishes of a few years ago, and decided to ponder over them, give them the benefit of their doubt, and see if anything could be made out of them. And they

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stuck manfully to their resolution, especially as the creditors were hourly expected.

The eldest son looked up all the maps and geography books he could get hold of, and studied them until he came to the uncomfortable conclusion that he would certainly risk death by sea and cannibals many times before he could hope to reach the furthermost summit of the globe.

The second son sat and waited for the voice he was both to hear and trace, until at night he gave up in despair. So he decided that the only voice worth listening to was that of common-sense.

The favourite son, meanwhile, went for a long walk, bent on success, and, unlike the others, full of a new hope. Yet, search as he would, he could find no spot where the atmosphere changed into stars at his bidding, and he returned home long after dinner-time disconsolate to his supper of soup which had grown cold.

The next morning the three brothers arose in disappointment and vexation of mind. They murmured loud and long at having been sent on fairy-tale errands in a world where no clever talking animals really existed, or kind-hearted inanimate objects volunteered to befriend them on impossible quests.

As the first-born explained :—

“ If I were to coax my parrot and ask him to

THE OLD-FANGLED FATHER

help me in return for my many years of kindness, as they do successfully in fairy stories, he would bite me for my pains, as he always does whenever I feed him."

And the second-born said :—

" If I were to fondle a pin and said, ' Ah, pin ! canst thou help me in my distress ? ' ten to one I would get pricked, and serve me right for being so imbecile."

" As for me," exclaimed the romantic one, " were a gentle wolf to find me mooning about the forest thinking of my beauteous Princess, surely would he stop and, with a keen sense of the fitness of things, he would not trifle with politeness, but he would eat of me as much as would satisfy his present need—perhaps even more than he could digest."

And the brothers laughed aloud in the splenetic bitterness of their three souls.

Another year went by. The sons had paid their father's debts and made some on their own account; so they held a council, and they confessed that they had idled so long because they were haunted by the rosy promise their father's words held out, and, do what they would, they could neither forget them nor yet find any solution.

Then together they pondered and thought, until

THE RAINBOW BOOK

one fine day (all the rest about that time had been wet) they concluded that as they were not believers in fairy tales, science perhaps might help them.

So they worked and worked and worked, each with his own object. They certainly did not lack brains, or test-tubes, or electric wire, yet just as certainly did they lack money; and, but for the occasional doing of menial work, they would have starved and starved and gone hungry.

At last the eldest son solved his mystery. Now could he surmount the furthest summit of the world, for he had invented a machine which could carry him soaring like a bird over mountains and over seas.

And the second son solved *his* mystery. Now he could hear a voice that came from no living throat and yet could see its traces, for he had invented an automaton that could speak and could record its words with a stylus upon tablets of wax.

And the third son solved *his* mystery. He had searched the atmosphere, and now at his bidding burning stars were showered down, for he had invented a kite fashioned on a wonderful wire, which went through the air and drew forth electric sparks. And his heart burned with love for the beautiful Princess whom he knew awaited him, though by this time she must be getting on.

The excitement of the brothers was great. "It

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is our genius we can thank ! ” they exclaimed all in three breaths. “ Our father, steeped in his old-fangled lore, never could have foreseen our triumphs. He never could have guessed how we should solve his posers.” That was their conclusion. Then they shook hands all round, congratulated one another, and went their different ways.

The eldest flew off, mounted upon his wonderful air-steed, amid the gaping of the astonished villagers, and his two brothers looked after him wistfully until he disappeared far away behind the clouds. The hopes of the traveller rose ever higher and higher as for weeks and months he soared on, exhilarated beyond all imagination. At last he came to the furthermost summit of which his dear father had spoken so solemnly. Over it sailed the son as easily as a bird. When crack ! the machine broke and collapsed, and the unfortunate inventor was hurled headlong into the sea, and every moment threatened to be his last, but wasn’t. As he floundered in the water he looked annoyed, and he murmured to himself :—

“ There must be some mistake. Who can truly say that I have found Contentment here ? ”

Meanwhile the second son had borrowed a camel and gone off with his precious automaton to the great city, there to reap the reward of his labours. All the way he reckoned how he could

THE RAINBOW BOOK

best enjoy the vast sums of gold which would be poured into his lap. And he came to the conclusion that to gaze at it would give more pleasure than to spend any of it, except just a little for coffers to keep it in. He laughed aloud in anticipation. Arrived at his journey's end, he unpacked his treasure and set it working, and was forthwith lodged in prison—for the city turned out to be as narrow-minded as it was great, and it assured him that he must be a wizard. He assured it he wasn't, and proved that he didn't believe in fairy tales, for he had not relied upon them for help. But it was of no avail; there was nothing more to be said. This disappointing ending to so much effort and such real success encouraged him in the conviction that in the position in which he found himself he could find no legitimate ground for Contentment.

During this time the favourite son had sallied forth singing in search of the beauteous Princess. His marvellous kite was slung behind him. He wended his steps toward the only Court he knew of, where dwelt a Princess good, beautiful, and unmarried—a combination of charms of marked rarity. So joyous and merry was he, that the squirrels squeaked and scurried away at sight of him, and the very hyenas laughed in harmony as he passed by singing, “Tra-la-la!” in his blithe lightsomeness. Ah, how glad-

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some and thrice happy was that merry, merry morn !

Now the Princess sat in the vast hall of the palace turning up her nose at the stream of suitors that promenaded in front of her, very bored and weary at the continuous routine. But she never seemed to tire of it in her certainty that “the right one” would put in his appearance at the right moment.

She was a very spoilt lady indeed ; there was no one to gainsay her. Indeed, so spoilt was she, that every night she would cry for the stars, and blame the skies for being selfish and not sparing her a few when they knew (for she had often told them) that she wished to wear them in her hair. And every one said how illogical it was of her, and no one told her they were too large for practical purposes.

One bitterly cold night, whilst she was sitting thus at her open casement, bemoaning the selfishness of the skies, and heedless of everything else, a mighty hubbub arose outside.

“ What ho ! ” called the pretty Princess. Her attendants came tumbling in to her in their eagerness to answer her summons.

“ What’s without ? ” she inquired.

Nobody knew, and tumbled out to get to know. They rushed back and told her all at once that a brand new suitor had arrived at that unusual hour,

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and would she snub him at once or tarry till the morrow? It took her a little time to unravel what was said amidst such a babel of voices.

“La! Oh my!” suddenly exclaimed the Princess, her eyes riveted outside on the blackness of the night. She could scarcely believe her senses, for there, in her garden, stars were actually falling down in showers, lighting up the figure of a man who, with upstretched hand, was beckoning them to come!

He was summoned at once to the royal presence, shivering and blue with cold; but his romantic heart throbbed at the sight of so much beauty, and his face assumed a warmer hue. He was so intoxicated with delight that afterwards he could never quite tell how it all came about. As in a haze, he remembered the Princess greeting him as the one long awaited; he recollects her saying that as he could wrest the stars from the selfish skies, he could gratify her desire to wear some in her hair, and bade him go collect them.

He explained his invention. She grew impatient. He told her the electricity would kill him. She shrugged her shoulders and insisted. He declined to take the risk. Whereupon she turned into a fury in her pretty illogicality, and exclaiming that he must be the wrong man after all, she flung his invention into the fire and ordered

THE OLD-FANGLED FATHER

him to be flung after it. He took the hint by the heels and fled through the window, far into the night.

Not at all Content with his romantic adventure, or with life as a whole, he enlisted and became a target in the front rank of the army.

It was, of course, some time later that the eldest brother—who had been plucked from the billows by a fisherman who happened to be passing by as usual—booked his passage home, and found on his arrival that the said home had been sold, as advertised, for building lots in eligible plots on easy terms, to pay expenses.

The second brother, in order to secure his freedom from poison, then and there smashed up his automaton and trudged home, arriving just in time to join his brother in being ordered away from their former doorstep, though still held responsible for the rates and taxes.

At that moment, too, the brother of the twain was deposited amongst them, having been invalided to his sold-up home for life.

So, in order not to trespass for fear of prosecution, they all three sat down a little outside the boundary line and recounted each to the others their adventures and their experiences. It was nightfall before they had done, and they really could hardly help laughing. And then, after

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thinking things out, they shook hands all round in silence.

For the prophecy had come true. *They were content.* The three sons were now thoroughly Content—to work no more, to do nothing more for the rest of their existence. It wasn't worth it, they said. Their disappointments were over, and they were fully Content that they should be so. The villagers, once more open-mouthed in their gaping, and open-minded too, differed from the inhabitants of the great city, and looked upon the brothers as who should say “three wise men,” and took upon themselves the care of them in the work-house, and were proud to get them, and to show them to visitors.

As to the beautiful Princess, she was changed by time into an old maid, and still kept on turning up her nose at elderly, rheumatic suitors as they passed on their usual rounds.

So the old father was right after all.

His ambitious son had surmounted everything, including disappointment.

His avaricious son had succeeded in having his wants supplied for nothing.

And his favourite son could jog along as romantically as the workhouse rules allowed, without labour and without effort.

THE LITTLE PICTURE GIRL



It was Christmas Eve, and a little girl lay in her little bed, wondering what Santa Claus was going to put in her stocking this year. It was hung up where he would be sure to see it, and upon the same chair before the fireplace she had thoughtfully placed her clothes-brush in case he might like to brush off the soot from his coat.

The grate held but a few smouldering embers, for it was late, very late—at least ten o'clock—and Minna ought to have been asleep hours ago. Perhaps she would have been, only there were so many things to wonder about to-night, and one cannot be sure of wondering about them when one is fast asleep.

So after wondering about Santa Claus, she turned to the stars, which she could see through the uncur-

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tained window : she wondered if they twinkled and winked like that because they liked it or because she liked it. Then there was the moon, which was looking straight at her in its own unblushing, beaming way and filled the room with its light ; and she sat up in bed and watched it, wondering where it went to during the day.

Now opposite her bed were three pictures, coloured and framed. One was of a dainty Columbine smiling at her companion picture—a Harlequin who stood on his toes with feet crossed, and his arms folded over his staff ; and the pair set her wondering what she would see at the promised pantomime.

Between them hung Minna's favourite picture. It represented a fine old moated house covered with snow. On the white path which led from the portico were tracks of little feet, manifestly made by the little smiling girl who stood in the act of passing over the bridge that spanned the moat. She appeared to be the same age as Minna, about six years old, and was dressed in a red pelisse and fur tippet. Her dark hair peeped from under a red, broad-brimmed hat with drooping feathers, and her hands were hidden in a large fur muff.

Minna herself had just such an outdoor costume, and when dressed for her walk she had often wondered where the little Picture Girl could be



The Little Picture Girl

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1903

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THE LITTLE PICTURE GIRL

going so gaily for hers. And now Minna wondered that once more as she glanced at her favourite picture, upon which the moon was shining so brightly to-night, till, bathed in the bright light, it seemed to stand right out from the shadows of the room.

There was a creak, as though the old wardrobe wanted to stretch itself after standing still so long—a funny little way furniture has now and again. But Minna didn't think it was the wardrobe this time—she thought Harlequin had done it. For it seemed to her as though he had suddenly stretched forth his arm and struck out with his staff. No—he was just as usual, only somewhat darker, being in shadow ; and as usual just ready to do something, yet never doing it.

But surely with the favourite picture there was something different !—some change ! It was always morning there. And now—why, now it was night ! The moon was lighting up the old moated house, and the stars were twinkling over its heavy, white-capped roof. Minna looked for the little girl in red—but there was no little girl in red on the bridge at all !

“Of course,” reflected Minna, “she must be in bed behind one of those little dormer windows fast asleep—for it must be very late.”

This seemed strange somehow, yet it was only

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just as it really ought to be. She herself never went for a morning walk in the middle of the night, nor had she ever heard of any one else doing so.

All at once, from the distant steeple which peeped through the white sparkling trees beyond the bridge, came a muffled striking of the hour, and Minna, to her increasing surprise, counted on her fingers up to ten, and then there were two more. And then, to her amazement, whom should she see on the bridge in the snow, which had begun gently to fall again—not the little girl in red—but dear old Santa Claus himself, covered up in fur and scarlet, trudging towards the house with tempting-looking parcels slung about him! Now he fixed a ladder against the thick, frost-laden ivy which covered the front of the old house, and he mounted it very carefully. Then he climbed up the roof as easily as if he had been walking along the high-road in the daylight. And then he disappeared down one of the chimneys. Very soon he reappeared without quite so many parcels, slowly descended the ladder, put it upon his shoulder, and walked off with it.

Minna's eyes followed him with the utmost astonishment and interest. Of course, she always knew that it was Santa Claus's lovely privilege to come down the chimney, but she had never actually known him to do it—and then the joy of seeing

THE LITTLE PICTURE GIRL



He mounted it very carefully

him come out again, evidently on his rounds, was breathlessly delicious !

THE RAINBOW BOOK

All was quiet now—only the moon and the stars and Minna watching over the slumbering house and garden, about which the soft snow-flakes hovered and fluttered. She had more than ever to wonder about now. She longed for a peep—just one peep—inside that beautiful house, to see if the little Picture Girl was really asleep.

Harlequin must have guessed what Minna wanted, for there is no doubt that he gave her a knowing look (though it might have been meant for sweet Columbine); and just as surely Minna saw his arm stretch out and heard the rap of his staff upon the picture frame. Then he pretended he hadn't done it; but she forgot all about him, so great was her interest in what she saw.

At that touch of Harlequin's the scene had changed to a dainty bedroom. It was dawn. A red pelisse and hat hung upon a peg on the door, and a large muff peeped from its box on the shelf. A rosy light tinged the face of the child who was sleeping there in the old wooden bedstead, and woke her up. The first thing the little Picture Girl did was to look with content into her stocking. It was very fat. And then, with a little pant of delight, she discovered a lovely doll lying on her pillow. First she hugged and then she kissed it; then she laid her new treasure beside her, her heavy eyelids drooped, and she fell asleep again.

THE LITTLE PICTURE GIRL

And nothing stirred.

“More, please!” said Minna, by this time quite at home with Harlequin. Again he gave that knowing look, and did as she asked. A rap, and once more she saw the garden. It had stopped snowing, and the sun was rising over the old roof.

Suddenly a little sweep appeared, swung himself up by the ivy, crept stealthily up the tiles, and disappeared down a chimney. In a moment he reappeared with a doll and a fat-looking stocking, all so quickly that, before Minna had time to clasp her hands and cry out, he was gone altogether. She looked at Harlequin, but he paid no attention.

“More!” she repeated eagerly. Harlequin’s staff then moved and rapped.

And there was the breakfast-room in the old moated house. The master of it sat at the table reading his newspaper. Soon he looked up and nodded encouragingly at his little daughter, who very seriously was making his tea. She nodded back and smiled. But it was a sad little smile, and her eyes were rather red, as though something had happened.

Then the door opened, and, to every one’s surprise, in marched a stout beadle. In one hand he held a doll and a stocking full of sweets, and in the

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other he held the collar of a little sweep, with the little sweep wriggling inside it. Close behind there came a tiny crippled girl, who moved painfully by the aid of a crutch to the boy's side, and laid a trembling hand on his arm. The brother and sister were much like one another, in feature and in squalor. Great tears were rolling down her cheeks, and her poor face was no whiter with pain than his with fright beneath the soot, though, looking lovingly at her, he tried to appear brave.

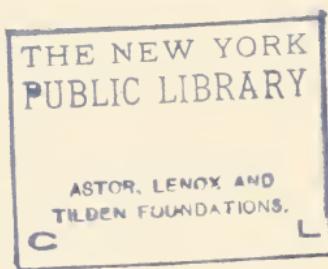
The beadle noticed the little Picture Girl's look of recognition at sight of her lost treasures, and as he gave them back to her he pointed to the black marks on the doll's frock, which tallied with the little sweep's grimy paw, and then jerked his head towards the crippled child in whose possession he had found them. Then the stout beadle gave the boy a shake, just to remind him of his wrong-doing—as if any further reminder was needed!—and made for the door, dragging the wretched offender after him.

But the little Picture Girl showed so much distress, stopped him, and looked at him so piteously, and with so much kindness in her sweet eyes, that he let go his grip of the collar. Then she put the presents into the boy's hand, and pushed him gently towards his sister. But the lad shook his head sadly, and looked more ashamed than ever.



In marched a stout beadle

A. H. Thompson
1903



THE LITTLE PICTURE GIRL

The little Picture Girl glanced at her father, who had been silently watching the scene. He nodded, so she pressed them on the boy, whose eyes now filled with tears as he gazed, humbled and grateful, at the beautiful young lady whose generosity saved him from punishment. Meanwhile, the gentleman Christmas-boxed the beadle, who smiled fatly and went his way. Then, for a moment or two, the picture-father's uplifted finger wagged a warning at the boy, who hung his head : but Minna could see that it was not so very terrible, because, if the boy had not confessed his fault, how would the beadle have known in what house he had yielded to temptation for his sister's sake ? The little cripple dried her eyes at seeing her brother safe, and was very grateful for the gifts she hesitated to accept. But she had a right to keep them now ; and it was not her fault that she was the innocent cause of her brother's offence.

Food from the breakfast-table was wrapped up in the newspaper, the big bundle was put into the little sweep's arms, and the two poor waifs who had entered so miserable were sent away happy at the bright moment which had entered into their dark lives, whilst the little Picture Girl, who for the second time had lost the presents Santa Claus had brought her, looked after the poor little pair

THE RAINBOW BOOK

quite content, and smiled as she waved good-bye with her pretty hand.

Then the master of the old moated house wiped his spectacles, which somehow had become quite misty. He lifted up his little daughter in his arms and kissed her, and, putting his hand into his pocket, drew from his purse a gold piece which she took with a laugh of surprise and delight, and threw her arms round his dear bronzed neck.

Minna saw nothing more. She must have fallen fast asleep.

It was very late when she awoke. The first thing she did was to smile as she trotted off to look at what Santa Claus had put in her stocking. She had seen him on his rounds. She had seen his parcels. Dear, kind old Santa Claus, who saves up all the year to be the loving, generous friend to little children at Christmas-time. Minna smiled again as the thought flashed through her mind. She approached her stocking. It looked rather thin—horridly thin. It was empty ! She ran to her pillow. Nothing on it, nothing under it ! She could not understand it. Oh, Santa Claus !

She gave a big gulp, and decided to wait and see what her father would say about it. She had to bustle too, for the bell would very soon ring for breakfast, at which it was her duty to preside.

THE LITTLE PICTURE GIRL

“Papa, Santa Claus has forgotten me!” were her first words after the morning kiss.

At this, her father pursed up his lips with a



Smiled as she waved good-bye

blank look. “Dear, dear! Good gracious! ‘Pon my word! What a forgetful old Santa Claus.

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I'm afraid he's getting past his work. Perhaps," he said, turning to the window, as a tear was gathering in each of Minna's bright eyes, "the snow was too thick."

"No, Funnyums" (she often called him that), "it wasn't the snow. I know he was out in it, 'cos I saw him."

"Saw him, did you?" he replied, smiling. "Well, perhaps he gave all the toys away till there were none left, and then, as the shops were shut, there were no more to be had!"

Minna now felt sure her father was joking as usual, and that there must be some secret.

"But perhaps, Minna, Santa Claus came to my room by mistake," he added. "In fact, it occurred to me that he might. He's getting short-sighted, you know, and—we are so very much alike. Suppose you go and see!"

Away she ran, and there, sure enough, were Funnyums's two socks hung up! One looked full, the other looked empty. She found in the full one all sorts of good things to eat. Minna emptied it quickly.

"I wish Funnyums wore stockings," she murmured. Then she went to the empty one, which wasn't empty, because right down in the toe there was a gold piece!

Then Funnyums was hugged, and Funnyums

THE LITTLE PICTURE GIRL

was thanked, and scolded for being up to his tricks again, and then hugged once more to make it all right. All that stirring time he was quietly pretending to read his newspaper—just as though he really wanted to read it at all!

And Minna forgot everything in the excitement of Christmas Day. That night she slept soundly. The following day she went to the pantomime, and afterwards dreamt about Columbine.

It was only on the morrow that she noticed again her favourite picture, and then her mind wandered back to the wonderful things that had happened there. And as she gazed at the little girl in red, who was going out so joyously for her morning walk, it occurred to her where the little Picture Girl must be going to—she was going out, as Minna was, to spend the gold piece *her* father had given her!

“Ah, she deserved it,” Minna said to herself. “I—I don’t quite think I’ve deserved mine—that is, quite so much. I should like to do something for children who suffer and are poor,” she muttered, “like—like the children in the hospital.” And slowly, as she thought it out, she made up her mind that the doll she was going to buy should be a very small one, and that the rest of the money from the gold piece she would send to the “Children’s Hospital Fund.”

THE RAINBOW BOOK

Seldom has any child felt happier than Minna did that sunny morning as she donned her red pelisse and hat, and took her muff from its box. She paused at the door, and glanced at the little Picture Girl, who was smiling back at her. "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!" said Minna out loud, dropped her a little curtsey, nodded gaily, and ran out.

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY'S DREAM

“She pricked her hand with the point of the spindle, and fell into a deep, deep sleep.”

AND the creepers that had been climbing over the castle walls for a long time, searching for the turret chamber wherein the sleeping Princess lay—the ivy, the jessamine, the briar rose—climbed round odd niches and corners, as if all were curious to see the lovely maiden under the Fairy Spell. But the years went by and none had reached so high, though one sweet little briar rose had not given up hope, and crept steadily onward and spread as it went. And this is the dream of the beautiful Princess :—

She dreamt that she arose and wandered forth out of the castle gates, on to the sunlit terrace. Her attendants had dozed over their labours, and she wondered at their laziness. The peacocks had stopped in their strutting and had fallen asleep; even the singing-birds in the trees had ceased their trilling and hidden their little heads under their wings. But the Princess did not tarry. She went straight on, past the closed-up daisies and sun-

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flowers and the drooping foxgloves, past the gold-fish drowsing in the fountain basin, for all around Nature was hushed and had fallen asleep.

Without hesitation she crossed the meadow of wild flowers, and reached the willow path that skirted the sparkling river, and did not stop until she reached a willow larger than the rest. Then, bending under its branches, she neared the water's edge. There an old wooden skiff was moored ; lifting her silken robe, she stepped into it, unfastened the cord, and, reclining on the embroidered cushions, she closed her eyes with a happy sigh. Away drifted the bark with its lovely burden. The sunlight turned to twilight with lurid gleams, and pale green flecks jewelled the sky ; the twilight turned to dark grey and silver, and the moon and stars watched her on her way. The bark floated to where the silent river joined the open sea ; still peacefully on it went, over the bosom of the moonlit ocean, onward into the night.

The Princess's sweet thoughts were disturbed by the sudden stopping of her craft, which had run aground on the sands just where the tiny wavelets retreated shyly, to venture again and as quickly withdraw.

Soft and balmy was the summer's night, and on the breeze music came, wafted towards the young Princess, who smiled and landed lightly, drawn by

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY'S DREAM

the bright strains which led her, following, to a pleasure ground. Lights hung festooned in the great trees, and in an open space peasants in their picturesque costumes were dancing, and laughing as they stepped. The Princess, from behind a tree, gazed on the scene, on the glades and lake in the distance—all mysterious in the night ; and as she listened to the laughter and the music, she knew she had never heard anything so delightful before.

Happy at the sight and sounds, she moved from behind the tree, and she saw a young man approach her with great respect—one of a group who were not dancing. The Princess would have fled, but he was already close ; and although his dress betokened origin as humble as that of those around, he was as handsome as a young god. They looked into one another's eyes ; then she accepted his invitation to dance.

Afterwards they sat together on a mossy knoll and talked low—all was silent around, and the light of the stars was reflected in the glow-worms, but the Princess did not tell him who she was ; and when he spoke of a quest on which he was about to start, to find his unknown betrothed, who awaited him in a distant land, she wept. Her sweet tears fell upon his hand, which he raised to his lips and reverently kissed them there, and she smiled on him for doing so. But the smile faded as an old

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woman came, and, plucking him by the sleeve, told him it was the hour to go. And when the Princess was alone she felt as though she had never known before what it was to be alone.

“. . . and she would be awakened by a king’s son.”

How long a time passed by she did not know. But again she saw the handsome peasant youth. And her heart sank as she thought that her release could come only through the kiss of some king’s son who could claim her for his wife. Then she pondered no more, for she saw the traveller now, far, far away, where she could not get near him ; and he was in a forest path, wrestling with desperate fury with a giant who had barred the way.

Breathlessly she watched the youth as he struggled in the brawny monster’s clutch. The Princess, moved by his stress, cried out in her sleep. Then the rays of the noonday sun, redoubling their forceful heat, shone forth with overpowering energy. The giant, struck with the pain of it, clasped his hands to his head, and fell backwards like a log to the ground.

The Princess knew that her love was safe, and by her fear for his safety she knew, too, how dear he was to her. And she went on dreaming—dreaming happily of what might be the future shared with one she loved so much.



When she accepted his invitation to dance.

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THE SLEEPING BEAUTY'S DREAM

Her heart fluttered as with foreboding of evil. She beheld a range of mountains, and up the foot of one of the peaks a peasant youth toiled his weary course. But the mountain was so slippery that his efforts were of no avail. As he gazed round she could see the handsome features, clouded by fatigue that almost was despair. She saw that the mountain was glistening, and that it was made of ice.

Then she felt the breath of summer. She saw it lift the white pall from the earth—she saw it melt the belt of ice, and as she looked the mountain dissolved into water under the warmth of her love. She saw that he was safe, trudging over the carpet of cowslips, smiling as he went. She wanted to run towards him, but he passed through a thicket and disappeared from sight.

The Princess arose to follow him. But she lost her way, and wandered on and on through a dense forest, where nothing stirred but scampering hares and startled squirrels.

At last, towards evening, she came to a path all gay with glowing flowers, refreshed by their evening bath of dew, and whispering to one another a hushed good-night ere closing their eyes to the light. As the Princess passed along, the strains of an organ fell upon her ear, and she saw a great temple before her. She stood at the open door. Within,

THE RAINBOW BOOK

hundreds of candles lighted the vast grey dome. And far beyond, in a haze of mystery, stood the man she loved, and by his side his bride, all veiled in white. And she knew his quest was done, and that he had found her whom he had gone to seek. Then there was a stir in the multitude, and a peal of bells rang out on the stillness without. The Princess sank down and felt as though she swooned.

A kiss was on her lips, and she trembled, for she knew the moment had come for the Prince to claim her. But the kiss was sweet. The Sleeping Beauty came slowly back to consciousness ; she awoke, and before her was a tall knight in silver armour. His handsome features were lighted up with joy : she knew him well, and, enfolded in his embrace, she murmured happily :—

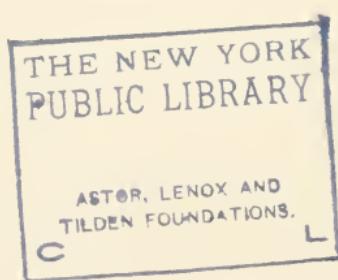
“ It is you, O Prince, the youth of my dream ! ”

And the little briar rose peeped in at the turret casement and nodded in the breeze at the lovers as they sat close clasped, and as the bells pealed forth, told the news to the ivy, which told it to the jessamine, until soon the tidings spread over the great city far and wide, and over all the joyful land.



"It is you, O Prince, the youth of my dream!"

Bernard Partridge



THE GAMEKEEPER'S DAUGHTER

“JUST run up to the Grange and tell her ladyship the bull-pup is doing nicely, and that you bandaged its leg as she showed you. Make haste, lass, if you're not too tired, as her ladyship would like to know before she drives out.”

“All right, Dad ; I'll run. It's much too cold to walk.”

Rogers, the gamekeeper, glanced with pride after the little retreating figure, and then, as his old mother was standing in the draughty porch awaiting him, he kissed her wrinkled face, and they entered the cottage together.

Nancy was soon at the Grange, her cheeks aglow under the scarlet hood of her cloak. New people were at the big house, and there seemed a deal of bustle going on. She waited in the vestibule and stared at the brightness, at the beautiful pictures and decorations where, ever since she had known the Grange, all had been damp and decay. She had never seen anything like this before, and she was enjoying the novelty, mixed with awe at all the grandeur, when a little

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girl richly dressed, about three years old, ran up to her. Nancy dropped a little bob of a curtsey, as her grandmother had taught her to do to the gentry.

Little Iris was not at all shy, and was full of one thought only—the thought of Christmas—so that she burst out with: “D’you know to-morrow’s Christmas Day?” and, without waiting for a reply, she babbled on: “I’m going to have such boo’ful things—a dolly that sends kisses, a pamberlator for her to ride in, a gold watch with real ticks, and a titten with real scratches. Guess who’ll bring them.”

“Her ladyship?” ventured Nancy, dazzled at such a haul of magnificence.

“No, not Mummy,” exclaimed Iris, capering with delight and revealing more of her frills and laces.

“I can’t guess, Miss,” said Nancy, smiling through her diffidence—which was just what Iris wanted her to say.

“It’s Santa Claus! Santa Claus always brings me just what I want. Isn’t it clever?”

“Who’s Santa Claus? Is it your aunt, Miss?”

“I’m ’peaking to you about Santa Claus—a gen’lman. I’ve not seen him—never been able to catch him yet.”

“Catch him! But who tells him what you want?” She was getting quite interested.

THE GAMEKEEPER'S DAUGHTER

“The little bird.”

Nancy felt completely mystified. What a different world this seemed to hers!

“What toys are *you* going to get?” continued Iris.

“Oh, no *toys*. I live in the cottage in the forest. Dad is always so busy, and I help him look out for poachers—so I have useful presents, I don’t have toys. Granny gave me this warm cloak last year; and then, Dad’s pockets get so full of sweets that they last for months.”

“Sweets and useful things aren’t p’esents,” said Iris, surprised. “Poor little girl! Wouldn’t you like toys?” she added.

“I think so, Miss—at least, I’ve not seen many. Cousin Janey has a skipping-rope and a workbox, but she won’t let me touch them.”

“Ah! you’ve been here long enough, Iris darling. I hear Nurse calling you,” exclaimed a soft voice, and her ladyship, with a kindly look at the visitor, laughingly caught up her little daughter in her arms before the child even knew she was there. Then she received the message, gave the little messenger a slice of cake, and in a moment Nancy was leisurely munching the fee as she trudged her way back on the grass through the frosty park. The dusk was gathering, when suddenly in the stillness she heard a dull thwack

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as of a stick against a branch—which caused her to stop and listen. She knew what the sound meant.

“That’s one of those poachers: he’s knocked down a pheasant, I’ll be bound!” said the game-keeper’s daughter to herself. “I’ll just be after him!” and, gathering her skirts close around her, she crept through into a thick plantation. She had the intrepid fearlessness of her father, whose companion on his rounds she had been, when no danger was thought to be afoot, ever since she was old enough to ride pickaback. It came quite natural to her to help him, and though the old grandmother grumbled at her boyish ways she said nothing, for the child was obedient enough, and could read and write and sew; and, moreover, her son would brook no interference with his treasure—especially since her mother had died.

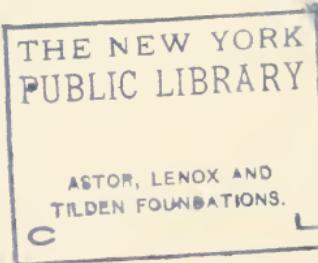
“Drop that!” cried Nancy. “Who’s there?”

Hearing only a girl’s voice, a rough-looking fellow emerged grinning from behind a tree, with the dead bird he had just picked up in his hand. A limp bag was slung over his shoulder, a stout staff was in his other hand, and a snarling “lurcher” dog slunk at his feet.

“Steady, Muffins!” said the man, giving the cowering animal a gentle kick as a reminder. “Now, Missy, what can I do for you?”



"You can just hand over that pheasant"



THE GAMEKEEPER'S DAUGHTER

“You can just hand me over that pheasant. Ah! it’s you, is it? I know you, Tom Grollins, and I’ll report you to the gamekeeper.”

The poacher gazed at her stupidly for a moment. “Give you the blessed bird and be reported too, Missy? Come, that ain’t ’ardly fair, is it? (*Will yer lie down, Muffins?*) Now look ’ere. If I give yer the bird, will y’promise not to say a word as it was Tom Grollins—on yer davey, now? Will y’promise, Missy?”

She nodded. Tom Grollins was not very strong of intellect, and he was a known coward, and as the sound of a carriage was heard close by, the bargain was hastily concluded; the pheasant was handed over without further parley on the undertaking of the promise—“No names.”

The promise, of course, Nancy faithfully kept when she delivered to her father the bird she had demanded with such pluck and authority, and told him how she had got it. The gamekeeper laughed, remarking that he wouldn’t press her, but could make a pretty shrewd guess if he chose. However, she was worth her weight in gold, he said, and he patted her on the head for a trump—and Nancy felt uncommonly proud. But she didn’t quite understand what he meant when he said that terms such as she had made would not be quite approved of by the Lord Chancellor.

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Then as Granny came in Nancy told of all she had seen, and of all the wonderful presents the tiny lady at the Grange was going to receive at Christmas, because she wanted them ; and that a gentleman staying at the house called Mr. Santa Claus gave them, and knew what to get, because a bird—a parrot, she supposed—had heard and told him what the little lady wanted.

That night when Nancy was in bed she could think of nothing else but Santa Claus and the wonderful toys ; and the thoughts were just beginning to get confused with a greatly envied skipping-rope and workbox, when she suddenly sat bolt upright in bed wide awake.

Her room was a tiny one leading off the kitchen, and in the moonlight she had just seen Tom Grollins pass by—this time with a full bag on his back, and the faithful Muffins was close at his heels.

“ Well, I never did ! ” exclaimed Nancy, in her astonishment and vexation unconsciously quoting her grandmother ; “ *I never did !* Now what’s to be done ? Gran’s no use—Dad’s out. But Dad’s sure to find that wicked poacher,” she reflected, on hearing the clock strike nine : “ he’s in the forest, and can’t be far.” And she lay back, relieved at the thought that her father had suspiciously refused the invitation of a shabby, gaitered, and very

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doubtful sportsman, to drink Christmas in with mulled beer at the village tavern. She had heard her father remark afterwards that he wanted “to be within earshot of gunshot.” So she wouldn’t worry, for Tom wouldn’t get the things after all.

After a time Nancy changed her mind. As in a dream, but not feeling a bit sleepy, she quickly donned her cloak, stealthily opened the kitchen door so as not to disturb the old lady, and hastened out into the night. Curiously enough, she didn’t feel cold in the bleak air—and in her hurry she never even noticed she was without shoes or stockings.

In front of her was a man, and she quickened her pace. She soon overtook him—sooner than she expected, for dark clouds overshadowed the moon, and she was at his side before she knew it.

“Tom Grollins!” she exclaimed, breathless and indignant: “how dare you! I’ve caught you again!”

“I’m not Tom Grollins,” replied her companion in a deep, manly voice, in which a funny chuckle seemed to rumble.

For a moment the child hesitated. It certainly didn’t sound like Tom Grollins’s whiny treble, but then—perhaps he was pretending, so as to put her off.

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“Yes, you are,” she retorted firmly. “Now, what are you doing here?”

“It’s a secret.”

“You’re after poaching again. I shall report you to Dad. And,” she added severely, “you’ve just got to give me this very minute all you’ve got in that bag.”

“All in my bag? Softly, softly: wouldn’t that be highway robbery, with threats?” answered the jolly voice, and with a laugh—“Oh, greedy!”

Nancy stopped and stared hard, but it was too dark for her to see him, as she had done from her bed. He had stopped too.

“Who are you, then?” she asked lamely.

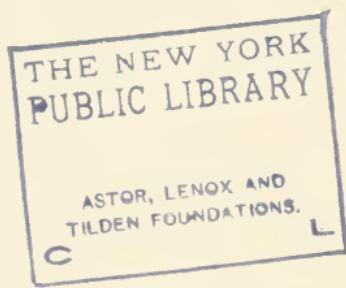
“Santa Claus,” came the reply.

“Santa Claus!” repeated the child in astonishment.

The dark cloud-wrack happened to part, and Nancy saw towering above her the dearest and most imposing old gentleman imaginable, with a large smiling face and long white beard. White curly hair fringed his holly-decked scarlet cap, and his long, loose, red coat revealed here and there glimpses of scarlet plush beneath. Instead of rabbits and pheasants, he was laden with the newest of toys; and as to Muffins, he was nowhere to be seen—unless he was that toy-dog dangling from the overflowing bag, and wearing a leather collar with



"Who are you, then?"



THE GAMEKEEPER'S DAUGHTER

bell attached, and a leather muzzle that ought to allay the fears of the most nervous.

“Yes, little woman, I am Santa Claus—himself!” he repeated, with his jolly chuckle.

“I—I—beg your pardon,” stammered Nancy, quite confused.

“It’s all right,” he replied good-humouredly. “Now shall I see you home before I continue my rounds?”

“Oh, may I come with you?” The words had dropped out of her mouth before she could stop herself.

Santa Claus shook his head. “Come with me, indeed? I should think not! Come with me? ‘Pon my word!” Then he hesitated and smiled, and said kindly, “Well, come along, dear. You’re a good, brave little girl. But you must know I’ve never made such an exception before. However, it’s so odd to find a child who doesn’t know me—even such a little village mouse as you—that we must really make one another’s acquaintance.”

He drew Nancy under his cloak to keep her extra warm, and to hide her from view, and he showed her how she could peep out. Then he took her by the hand, and the quaint pair proceeded along the mysterious-looking forest until they came to the part Nancy loved best. There, heaps and heaps of fir-trees grew, the tall ones protecting the wee ones,

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and the wee ones doing their best to try and grow tall too.

Santa Claus stood still, and looked around, as if in preparation of some important matter. Nancy felt something was going to happen, and she peered up into the face of her guide.

“Father Christmas has come!” he proclaimed loudly at last.

And then what a change there was! The fir-trees all became Christmas-trees, lighted each one—big and little—with candles, blue or green, yellow or red, each burning with the same coloured light. And from the diamond-frosted branches hung toys innumerable. At the top of each tree stood triumphant a fairy-doll with wand outstretched.

Nancy clasped her hands with rapture at the sight. “Oh, Santa Claus!” was all she could exclaim.

He lifted her on to his shoulder, and let her gaze until she had gazed enough. Now, indeed, she realised what toys were—whence they came, and how they grew.

Then she felt he was carrying her away, and her heart beat with curiosity and excitement, for she knew Santa Claus was proceeding on his rounds to pay visits to all the sleeping children who deserved it, while she was clinging to his dear old neck, and would see all that went on.

THE GAMEKEEPER'S DAUGHTER

The first visit was to Iris at the Grange, whither Santa Claus was already on his way. They entered the pretty bedroom, where the spoilt little lady was smiling in anticipation in her sleep; and the “dolly, pamberlator, watch, and titten with real scratches” (immovably asleep) were all produced as though by some conjuring trick from Santa Claus’s basket or deep pockets, and duly placed to meet the child’s eager glance on her waking.

“Mr. Santa Claus,” whispered Nancy, who had been wondering all the time, “how did we get here?”

“Chimney!” he whispered back.

“Chimney?”

Santa Claus nodded.

This didn’t make her much wiser, for to her knowledge she had never seen the inside of a chimney in her life; but she forgot to pursue the subject now that something more interesting was going on.

Iris had vanished, and a pale little boy lay asleep in a room above a flower shop.

“He doesn’t care for toys,” whispered Santa Claus; “he loves that pink geranium by his side.” And a gaily painted watering-pot was placed next to his flowering possession. “How white in comparison with the blossom the suffering, pinched little face looks on the pillow!” thought Nancy; “he *will* be pleased.” Before they left, Santa Claus filled the can with water from the cracked toilet jug.

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In the large house across the way were sounds of bright music—a party was going on.

“I’m afraid it’s too early to go there yet,” said Santa Claus, consulting his great watch. “However, we’ll go and see; it’s really high time for all youngsters to be in bed.” In the night-nursery were two cots. Both were empty. “I must call on my way back,” he said.

Just then the door opened, and childish voices were heard shouting: “Santa Claus! We’ll catch him if we’re quick!”

And there was only just time for the two travellers to disappear before the lights were turned up and the owners of the cots rushed in.

“Nearly caught that time!” exclaimed Santa Claus, as they proceeded on their way (it was extraordinary how alert and agile he was for such an old and portly gentleman), and he burst out into a loud laugh, and only recovered from it as they entered a long room full of small beds. It was decorated with holly and mistletoe. A light burned at one end, where sat a pleasant-looking nurse half-screened in the corner by the fire.

Nancy followed Santa Claus’s movements with breathless interest as he flitted to each little sleeping occupant of the hospital ward—for such it was—placing here a toy horse of skin and harness with a long wavy tail; there a lovely picture-book with a

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green cover, on which the title was printed in large gold letters.

Twice only did Nancy heave a little sigh, quickly repressed, and her eyes filled with longing: once when a skipping-rope was loosely tied round the clasped hands of a little girl who was convalescent, and was going to leave, as Santa Claus explained; and once again when, creeping on tiptoe, he placed under the chair of the dozing nurse a very smart workbox, with the name engraved on top.

Every now and then Santa Claus would linger to smooth the look of pain from a little suffering face into a smile, or touch with his cool palm a little fevered hand.

As she trotted round with him, tears of pity and happy sympathy filled Nancy's eyes, and she tried to give Santa Claus a good hug—only she couldn't reach half-way round—while he tenderly wiped those tears on his big cuff, and carried her off, a long way, to a very poor cottage. There they peeped round from behind the door.

Everything looked bright, and sounded happy too, and every now and again, amid the laughter and the chatter, the arrival of Santa Claus was gaily prophesied. Three little girls were dancing round three of those tiny decorated Christmas-trees Nancy had seen that eve, and their parents, looking on happily, echoed their exclamations of joy. She

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was surprised to see so much jollity in so poor a place ; but Santa Claus didn't seem to be so—he merely muttered, " It's all right this year ! " and withdrew with her the same way they had come.

" And now," remarked Santa Claus cheerily, " before I go back to the party children or do anything else I must visit all the other hospitals. I've brought you home because you must be very tired, little woman. I'm terribly busy to-night—half afraid I shan't get it over in time : just think of the disappointment if I don't ! So good-night, Nancy ! Pleasant dreams ! A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year ! "

And his kind face bent over her in bed, as it had over so many others that Christmas Eve ; and as he pressed her hand he added, with a smile, " I've a terrible lot to do, and I mustn't forget *anybody* ! "

The dawn heralded once again a Christmas Day, and when the sun peeped forth he awoke Nancy. She looked round, and uttered a cry of surprise and delight. For before her astonished eyes she seemed to see a little fairy-land all to herself. Grouped about her bed were a skipping-rope, a workbox—both handsomer than Janey's—and a little box besides. She couldn't believe they were real, so she felt them all over, and not only found they were quite real, but the little box when it was touched sent forth the most lovely, mysterious music.

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“ Dear, kind, darling Santa Claus ! ” exclaimed Nancy. Then she saw that beside them there was also a plum pudding with a Christmas card attached, from the new mistress of the Grange. What was puzzling was that on a chair close by hung three pairs of her father’s new socks with a paper asking her to mark them ; but they were marked already, and were full of good things to eat.

Never in all her nine years had Nancy had such a Christmas. After saying her morning prayers, she sat down at the table, where, with elbows out-spread and her little tongue peeping out as she moved her pen, she wrote the following letter :—

“ DEAR MR. CLAUS,—Thank you very much for those lovely presents : I like them very much. And thank you for the lovely time I had going about with you last night. I shall never forget it. Please forgive me for thinking you were the wicked poacher, Tom Grollins. I must now say good-bye.

“ I send you 200 kisses (x x x etsetra).

“ Your grateful little friend,

“ NANCY ROGERS.”

And then she addressed it to him at the Grange.

When Nancy had stamped and posted it, her grandmother and her father came in to breakfast, and received Nancy’s grateful thanks, for she wore a pretty new frock. Then she told them that as

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she had hurried back from the post-box, so as not to be late for breakfast, she had heard the head gardener say to the butler that Tom Grollins had been seen that night striding quietly along with a big bag well stuffed.

“But, Dad,” continued his daughter with conviction, “it isn’t true. I’m sure it’s a mistake.”

“Why isn’t it true, lass?” inquired her father. “It’s likelier to be true than not.”

“Because I made the same mistake myself,” said Nancy.

“Well, it would take a good deal to persuade me that my little meeting with that slippery rascal turned out to be a mistake!” exclaimed the game-keeper, as he set down his cup and smiled with satisfaction. “When did you meet him, little woman?”

“Last night.”

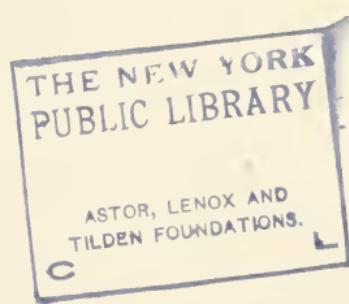
“And who do you fancy it was, dearie?” asked the old grandmother.

“I *know* who it was, Gran. It was Mr. Santa Claus!” As they smiled still, she ran and fetched his presents she was anxious to show.

And Nancy knew she was right, and that it *was* Santa Claus, for nothing more was heard of the poacher Tom Grollins for ever so long, and every one Nancy asked seemed to know all about Santa Claus having been on his rounds that night—even those who hadn’t seen him.



She ran and fetched his presents she was anxious to show



ALL ON A FIFTH OF NOVEMBER

MORNING

IT might have been the middle of the night; but it wasn't—it was Guy Fawkes' Day, and eight o'clock on a foggy morning. The London square was more than usually hushed and mournful, except for a warning call or whistle as a van cautiously lumbered along, or blundered on to the pavement. The nursery fire did its best to look cheerful: the lights were all on too, showing up the bright pictures on the walls and the bright faces of the three children who were chattering gaily at the breakfast-table. And they all looked so smart! Alec and Frank in their best suits, and tiny Molly wore her prettiest white frock and her coral necklace, just as if she were going to a party.

They soon scrambled off their chairs, and Molly, standing on tiptoe, seized hold of a bunch of lilies tied up with ribbon that was on the side table, and each of her brothers eagerly possessed himself of a neat brown paper parcel.

It was Father's birthday. The occasion was always kept as a holiday, and the children were waiting

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for his call to summon them to his dressing-room.

“I think he must be fifty!” remarked Alec.

“I fink he’s fifteen,” said their little sister.

She spoke in a tone of conviction, accompanied by a toss of her short curls.

“Don’t be silly, Mollikins,” replied the boys with a laugh; but she said she was sure she was right.

“Halloo, Kidlets! Come along down!” came the shout of a manly voice. There was a stampede, and a race as to who should get there first. Molly arrived a bad third, but it was she who was first for him, for he went towards her and picked her up. She put her free arm around his neck, but instead of making him her little speech she exclaimed as he kissed her—

“Why, Daddy, your chin is full of splinters!”

The boys delivered their presents, and were kissed or patted on the head, and thanked, before Molly parted with the flowers which she held so tightly in her little fist.

“Your Babyship is very kind,” said her father, gratefully shaking her by the hand, and, laughing still, he put her down. Then he took her hint, and seriously began to shave.

They knew they mustn’t talk to him whilst that important function was proceeding, so the three stood still, deeply absorbed as they watched the

ALL ON A FIFTH OF NOVEMBER

performance that fascinated them with its dangers and its hairbreadth escapes.

“Now I can kiss my little Mollikins and she won’t complain.” He put down the towel, took her up again, and rubbed his smooth cheek against hers.

“Daddy, tell me how old you are,” she asked, looking into his eyes.

“Oh, how can I do that? It’s a secret.”

“Do whisper it,” she coaxed. After a moment’s hesitation he smilingly whispered something into her ear.

“Oh, what a ‘tock of years!” she exclaimed.

“What is it?” clamoured Alec. “I’m sure I’m right.”

“I’m sure I am!” asserted Frank.

“*I know!*” cried the delighted Molly, bursting with importance. “May I tell?” Her father nodded. “Twenty-one!” she exclaimed triumphantly.

“Bosh! Why, he said he was that last year!” cried Frank.

“And the year before,” asserted Alec; “and the year before that—I remember quite well. Father always says that.”

“Guy!” called their mother just then. “Please send the children in to me.” She was having her morning tea, so the young people ran into the adjoining room to hug her and be hugged in return.

THE RAINBOW BOOK

NOON

“Sun’s tum out!” announced Molly, as she toddled away from the nursery window.

“Hooray!” shouted Frank. “It’s going to be fine for this evening!”

There were going to be great doings. Father’s birthday and Guy Fawkes’ Day made a grand double event long looked forward to with enjoyment.

“Hooray!” echoed Alec rather feebly, for he was desperately busy. Outside—now that the fog had lifted—the busy hum could be heard of everyday life, mingled with boys’ shouts as they trundled a guy about.

“I’ve found something out!” suddenly exclaimed Alec in a curious voice, and he spread out on the table the front page of an old *Times*. “Look here, Frank!” he continued in growing excitement. “Here, under the Births—marked with red pencil—‘Guy Thompson!’ That’s Father—here’s the date. Wait a moment. Now I’ll reckon it out. Hush! Don’t say anything while I do the sum. *I say!* Father is twenty-one!”

“I knew it!” exclaimed Molly, capering about. “I told you so.”

“Rubbish!” said Frank. “Molly, do shut up. Alec, where did you find that paper? How did it come here?”

ALL ON A FIFTH OF NOVEMBER

“I found it there, on the rocking-chair. It looks old, and it *is* old. See, here’s the date. It’s very funny! I wish we could find out—it *would* be jolly to find out all by ourselves, if this really can be true. I say, I know who’d tell us. I’ve heard all about Somerset House—where you can get to know about people and their affairs—only I don’t know where the place is, or who lives there.”

“An omnibus will take us anywhere,” spoke up Molly.

“Who’s *us*?” inquired Frank scornfully.

“Never mind *her*,” said Alec excitedly. “I’ll tell you what. Listen: this afternoon, when we’ve got to be in the play-room, let’s go in a cab to Somerset House, and just get to know once for all. I’ve got four shillings in my money-box; what have you got?”

“I’ll count.” Frank counted up to five shillings.

“The man may want more. Mollikins, what have you got in your purse?”

“Dot sixpence.”

“Well, if you pay your share, we’ll take you with us—that is, if you can put on your own hat. I can help you with your coat.” And so it was arranged.

And at three o’clock that cold afternoon Alec, Frank, and Molly might have been seen stealing forth into the keen air; they were supposed to be playing at marbles in the garret or they might

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have been seen, and packed back again. The boys were well muffled up, and Molly had her hat on with the back to the front. The three were in high spirits once they were off, and they realised the full importance of such an adventure. In Alec's hand was the sheet of newspaper in which the truth of the paragraph was to be tested. Alec hailed the first cab, the driver shook his head. The second paid no attention. The third asked them who they thought they were getting at and where they thought they were going to.

“Somerset House!” ordered Alec, after quickly lifting Molly in, and Frank had closed the door smartly. On the way there they behaved much better than they usually did when they drove out. No one fidgeted; no one complained of feeling hungry, or thirsty, or tired, or anything.

When they alighted the cabman was told to wait. Molly and her brothers passed through the imposing gateway of Somerset House, and were starting to cross the quadrangle, when they saw the Beadle in his fine uniform (whom they took to be the Duke), and learned from him where they could find the room of which they were in search.

“Births, please,” said Alec, bold as brass, to the gentleman behind the counter. He was leader and spokesman whenever they went shopping, and he was leader and spokesman to-day. Frank never in-

ALL ON A FIFTH OF NOVEMBER

terfered. And Molly had gone stonily shy. "Births, please," repeated Alec, impatient at being stared at.

"What name?" said the gentleman, looking at them amused.

"Thompson," replied Alec.

"Any particular Thompson? You see, we may have several Thompsons in our entries—five or six at least."

"This is Mr. Guy Thompson," said Alec, showing the marked paragraph.

"Very well," said the gentleman (who, thought Alec, must be the Duke's butler). "But have you got the fee?—the half-crown you must pay for the search?"

"A half-crown's very dear," said Alec. "Can't you do it for less?"

The gentleman looked at them with kindly eyes. "I dare say I can," he replied, putting his hand in his pocket, and rattling some coins. "But I'm afraid you'll have to pay a shilling. The King wants one." They paid their shilling for the King; watched while the gentleman looked up his records, and followed him into the corridor as he prosecuted his search. At last he said—

"Quite right. Born on the fifth of November: year's all right. It's all in order."

"Then Father *is* twenty-one?" queried both boys doubtfully.

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Molly hopped on one foot in suppressed excitement.

“*Your father!*” exclaimed the kindly clerk, handing back the coin. “Why, how old are you?”

“Ten,” replied Alec. “Thank you.”

“And so your father married at the age of ten or thereabouts, did he? Dear me; very precocious of him!” exclaimed the clerk, with such a serious face that the children felt quite uncomfortable. They had not considered the matter in that light at all. Their faces fell, and they felt such a wish they had never come that without a word of explanation they turned and fled. They were glad to be once more outside the building, and thankful to find the cabman still there waiting to take them back, and in their discomfiture he was hailed by them joyfully as a dear old friend.

“Home!” said Alec, when they were inside.

“And where might that happen to be?” asked the driver with interest.

Molly, womanlike, jumped at a conclusion. “We’re lost!” she wailed, and burst into tears, and it was only when she was in sight of her own nursery windows that she was comforted, and smiled once more. Without any inquiry, all their remaining savings were emptied into the willing palm of the delighted driver, who bowed his acknowledgments repeatedly.

ALL ON A FIFTH OF NOVEMBER

The children ran through the garden entrance unobserved, and had just got their outdoor things off when the tea-bell rang.

NIGHT

When Alec, Frank, and Molly entered the drawing-room, where their parents were in readiness, for the great annual frolic with Father, they didn't tumble in as was their usual habit; they walked in sedately. They had something important to say.

“Truly, Daddy, how old are you?” asked Molly, running up to him. She wouldn’t be hushed down by the boys. She felt she wanted to make sure of what she already knew.

“I told you I was twenty-one, of course! One always expects such a nice lot of presents when one is twenty-one! But you two young rascals evidently think I really must be a very old man of forty at least!” he replied, smiling.

“And does he never grow older, Mummy?”

“I don’t see it, Molly darling.”

“Do you ever see the *Times*, boys?” he inquired.

“That’s just what’s so queer,” said Alec. “I’ve got it here.” Alec noticed the glance which his parents exchanged, and their expression of astonishment when Frank remarked—

THE RAINBOW BOOK

“ We took it with us this afternoon to Somerset House.”

“ Yes,” corroborated Alec.

“ Me, too,” chimed in Molly.

And then they told of all they had done, and their parents tried to look grave, but couldn’t, and could scarcely speak for laughing, though they extorted a promise that nothing of the kind should ever again be attempted without permission.

“ Surely, what is in the *Times*,” reasoned their father, “ must be true—at least one must presume so.”

“ Halloa,” broke in Alec. “ I say, Frank ! Look here ! This Guy Thompson was born in Cambridge Square ! I never noticed that. Weren’t you born in Oxford Square, Father ? ”

“ Well, I think I might just as well have been born in one as in the other. All I know is, that if I *was* twenty-one, I am twenty-one—and the rest—you never asked me how many more. Come along, boys, now for our cushion-fight ! But first of all, here are your expenses back again—your Babyship, there’s your sixpence—and now I really can’t wait any longer for a romp ! ”

Soon the room was gay with laughter. Father, too, had to be a real guy and a “ pretend ” one, pushed about in the arm-chair with a funny long nose spoiling his jolly face. And afterwards they

ALL ON A FIFTH OF NOVEMBER

all danced whilst their mother played a hornpipe —and really it *was* very difficult to guess Father's years, they might have been anything !

Then he suddenly ran out. There was a rush to the window, the blind was drawn up, and soon, in the darkness of the night, a grand catharine-wheel was seen whizzing round in a blaze of dripping fire. Then such a glorious shoot of rockets arose ! Whish ! bang ! whish ! bang ! they went as they burst, each of them, into a shower of gorgeous stars all purple, and green, and gold.

“A—a—h !” exclaimed the three children, gazing with rapture. And—

“A—a—h !” they repeated over and over and over again, as splendour followed splendour, and the sky was powdered again and again with sparks of coloured fire.

FATHER CHRISTMAS AT HOME

TWILIGHT

IT was afternoon on a cold December day. Eva, all alone in the schoolroom, sat down on the hearthrug and looked thoughtfully into the fire. She was, however, not quite alone, for her tiny Yorkshire terrier sprang on her lap, and after turning round and round, pawing at her frock as though to make a comfortable hollow, settled cosily down.

“Dot,” she said, smoothing the hair back from its eyes, “I’m very miserable. To-morrow is Christmas Eve, and every one is happy except me. I’m in trouble again. Somehow, I’m always in trouble—I’ve spoilt my velvet frock washing your feet—and you didn’t want them washed, did you?” The Honourable Dot—to give it its full title—looked desirous of forgetting the incident, then licked her hand as a reply seemed expected.

“Perhaps if I had some brothers and sisters they’d get into mischief sometimes, and it wouldn’t always be me.” Dot paid no heed to her grammar, was bored, and sighed heavily.

FATHER CHRISTMAS AT HOME

“I really didn’t mean it when I said, ‘I gloried in being naughty.’ Don’t snore, Honourable! There’ll be complaints from next door.”

It was curious, but Eva was having remorse, brought on by all the talk of Peace and Goodwill which was in the air. “I’ve tried things before,” she muttered; “but I know what I’ll do this time,” she exclaimed, “I’ll give a cot to a hospital!”

The little dog growled a protest as she suddenly got up from the floor. Eva counted the money in her money-box. “I’ve five shillings all but three farthings. I’m sure that is nothing like enough!” she mused. “It must cost at least a million sterling pounds!” Tears came into her eyes, but they flowed down on to a smile, as she thought of some one who always managed to do kind deeds and who might help her. Father Christmas! Eva thought of asking no less a person than Father Christmas himself to advise her. But how to find him and get a nice quiet chat with him was the difficulty. That he would come to her on Christmas Eve she had no doubt, as he never forgot her; but she had only managed to be awake and see him once, a long time ago, and then she but got a glimpse of him, for he rushed out of her room as though in a terrible hurry.

Dot’s little mistress slept badly that night; she was racking her brain as to how she could manage

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to remain awake so as to see Father Christmas when he came, and then how she could coax him to stay for a talk—for she knew quite well how busy he must be when he was on his rounds.

The following afternoon, during a general rummage that was going on to find tiny candles and coloured glass balls that were over from last year's Christmas tree, Eva picked up a scrap of printed paper, which had come out of an old cracker. She took it upstairs to her favourite spot on the hearth-rug, and read it aloud to Dot :—

“ Father Christmas sends this note
From out his mansion by the moat,
To all who live on land and sea,
To honour Christmas Day with glee—
Inviting them to pass his way,
With glee to honour Christmas Day.”

Eva flushed with excitement. “ Why, it's a message from him ! ” she cried. “ It's some kind of invitation ! ” and she gave Dot such a squeeze of delight that the little creature squeaked shrilly, scurried off, and laid low under the table.

She thought and puzzled and pondered over the lines she had just read. At last she grasped their meaning. “ Of course ! How simple, after all ! ” she concluded. “ He lives at some moated house, and I must go to him, not wait for him to come to

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me. He always comes down the chimney—that's the way I must go up!"

Eva didn't hesitate a moment. The opportunity had come for which she longed. She ran down-stairs into the large, old-fashioned hall, which was overheated as usual, by the hot-air pipes, for the huge chimney-place was too much of a curiosity ever to be used. Here, she felt sure, was the starting-point of her adventure.

Luckily no one was about. It was windy when she looked up the great chimney, so she took her long, fair hair, and made it into a loose plait in order to keep it from blowing about her face. Then she prepared to start and secure the first footing.

Eva had never been up a chimney before, and when she began climbing she was quite surprised to find how nice and clean it was, with steps, and all white tiles. She toiled up, and up, and could see blue sky and fleeting white clouds above. After a time she stopped to rest in a little recess in the chimney side. When she started climbing again, the blue sky faded away, twilight came on, and in this very, very long chimney the light became quite dim.

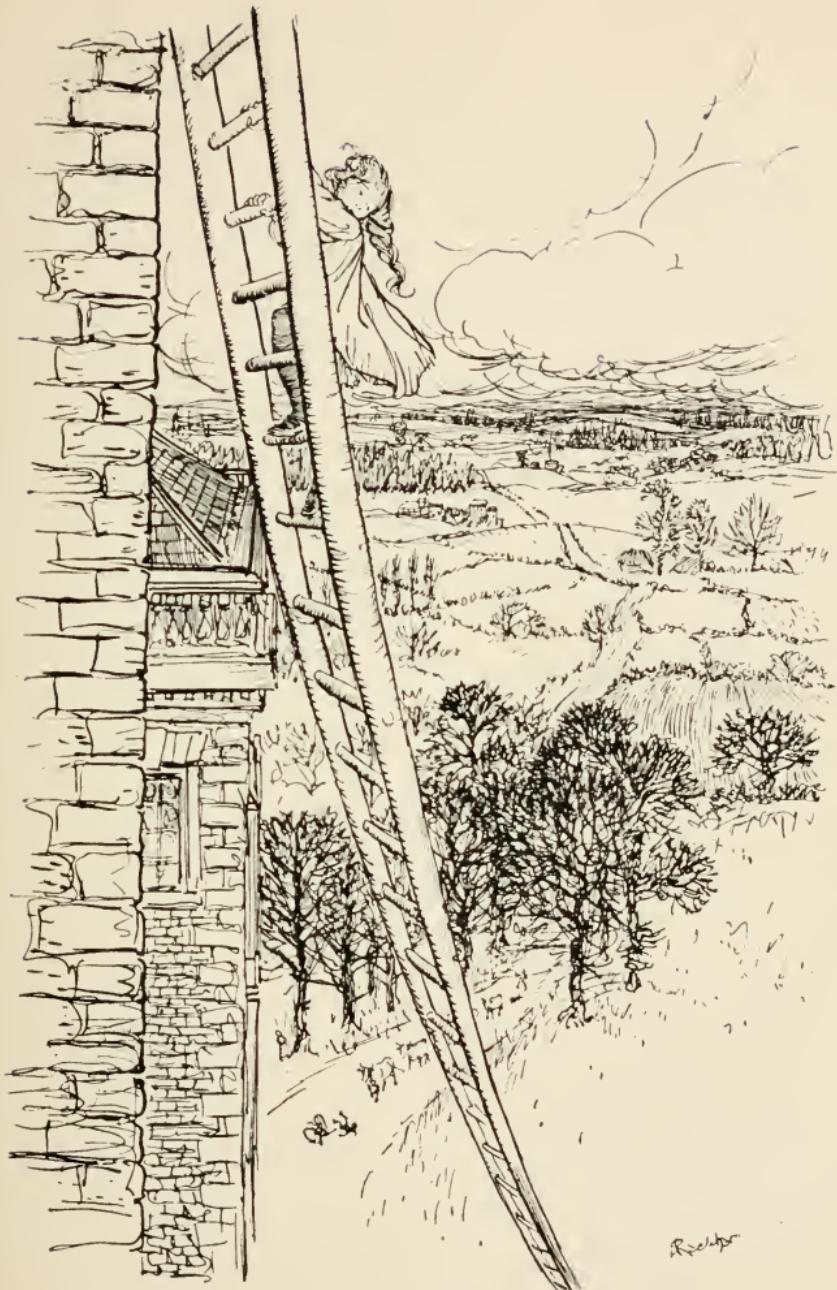
Very soon, however, she felt with a little thrill of pleasure the keen air all around her head and shoulders, and she knew she had come to the top.

THE RAINBOW BOOK

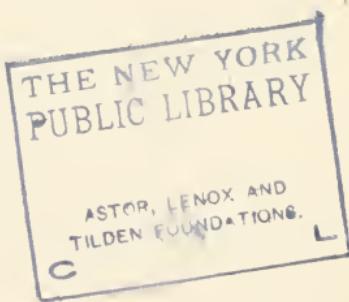
Fortunately there was a ladder—already placed for Father Christmas to mount—and down that she went, looking below all the time so as not to make a false step. It was a very, very long ladder indeed, and Eva began to think she would have to go on stepping down for ever, when at last she found herself on the ground again—in a country field with hoar frost stiffening the blades of grass, across which she ran straight ahead as hard as ever she could go.

STARLIGHT

Once only did she halt by the side of a lane to consider what she should do if she couldn't find her destination after all. Two robins alighted in front of her, hopped about, and fluttered forward ; they were so persistent that they interested her and she followed them. They flew along a side path, and Eva ran after them—ran till she arrived eager and breathless at a wooden bridge, and found that she was in a park ; that above her was the dark vault of heaven decked out in all its diamonds ; that the bridge led across a moat ; and that in front of her was a splendid old country mansion brilliantly lighted up, where the robins alighted on a window-sill, and paying no further attention to her, busied themselves with crumbs.



It was a very, very long ladder



FATHER CHRISTMAS AT HOME

Then Eva advanced, almost in spite of herself, went up the front steps, and standing on tiptoe, lifted the knocker and let it fall. The knocker resounded for a while musically, like a peal of bells; when they ceased, the door opened, and a very ancient man confronted her. He was tall and thin and bent, and was dressed in draperies, with bare legs, and he had a funny little curl in the middle of his bald forehead.

“Is Father Christmas at home, please?” faltered Eva.

“Yes, little Madam,” came the reply. “Do you want to see him? Really? But you will be astonished—I warn you. Aren’t you frightened?”

“Not a bit,” replied Eva.

“Brave little girl!” said the very ancient man. “Come in!” and he ushered her into an old oak-panelled room. It had a delicious sense of comfort, and a delight about it which, for the moment, she didn’t try to define. Her attention was attracted by catching sight of what she thought was her own reflection in the large mirror against the wall—it was a little girl who came in at the same time, and was of exactly her own height. As she looked closer she saw that the other child was uglier than herself, unkind in expression, slovenly in appearance, and tried to hide herself, rather, in the dark corner where she remained. And Eva,

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in the novel surroundings, soon forgot all about her.

At the far end was a great log fire, and near it a huge arm-chair, in which sat a stout, healthy, red-faced old gentleman warmly wrapped in a crimson dressing-gown ; he was leaning back, thinking or dozing. Eva advanced with soft steps. She was full of eagerness and excitement, for she recognised the white-bearded, handsome old face at once from the many coloured portraits she had seen. It was Father Christmas himself ! Eva never knew what impelled her to do it, but when she got close to him she simply threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

“ Bless my soul ! ” exclaimed Father Christmas, starting ; and catching her up, he seated her on his knee. He recognised her at once. “ How you’ve grown since last year, Eva ! ” and he looked at her with beaming eyes. “ I suppose you know you’re trespassing ? and the penalty is forty crackers or a kiss ! ” And he chuckled and laughed so merrily that she felt quite comfortable, finding trespassing a very pleasant occupation, and wasn’t a bit alarmed at the penalty.

“ And what brings me this honour ? ” he continued.

“ Good evening, Father Christmas,” spoke up Eva quite boldly. “ I’m afraid I disturbed you.”

FATHER CHRISTMAS AT HOME

“Oh yes, you’ve disturbed me all right,” he replied briskly, “but I was only resting a little



“I suppose you know you’re trespassing?”

after my labours before going on my rounds to-night.”

“What labours?”

“Toys. Toys and sweets. I’ve been making toys and things all the year through, and have only

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just got them finished in time. I love making crackers, too; I spend all my evenings writing mottoes for them."

"I found your invitation, Mr. Christmas."

"Bless me! did you now? Ah!" He stroked his beard thoughtfully for a moment and remained silent. Eva looked about her in amazement.

"Those are all secrets!" he observed after a time. Father Christmas included with a sweep of the arm the toys which were everywhere about—hanging from the ceiling, lying about on the tables and sofas, standing as ornaments on the mantelpiece, filling the shelves of the bookcases, peeping from behind the glass cabinets—toys wherever one looked.

He arose, and taking her by the hand, led her round to enjoy the pretty sight; and paying no attention whatever to the sullen little girl in the corner, he asked Eva if she would like to see around his domain. "Oh yes, yes," she cried. She quite appreciated the special honour that was being done her.

"They'll be coming in here soon to pack," he added. "I'm going to leave all these secrets myself at their destinations."

There was a tremendous bustle going on at the rear of the premises, where a whole army of packers, carriers, postmen, and porters were hurry-

FATHER CHRISTMAS AT HOME

ing about letting down toys from the loft, packing them, labelling them to places far and wide ; loading them on huge vans which came rumbling in and out of the courtyard with cracking of whips, and parting shouts of “Good luck !”

Superintending the arrangements, walking to and fro, was the very ancient man. He was so alert, and always on the spot where wanted, yet Eva was thinking his age must at least be two hundred, when Father Christmas said kindly : “ My dear, this is my father—he is known as Father Time, and you have known him without having really met him face to face before.”

“ I didn’t recognise him, and I didn’t know he was your father, sir,” she whispered.

“ Why, yes. Don’t you know that my full name is Christmas Time ?”

“ Of course it is,” she exclaimed with a laugh.

The next visit was through a covered way to the printing works—where the mottoes and “ directions ” for toys and Father Christmas’s visiting cards were printed. These cards were all different in design, and each was a beautiful picture stamped with his name, and his own motto, “ Peace and Goodwill.”

Behind was the sweet factory, with its tempting packets and muslin stockings of all sizes full of sugar-plums. But, as Father Time appeared,

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Father Christmas whispered that he feared they must not linger, and led the way up a spiral staircase in order to enable Eva to have a peep into the toy-loft, where men were letting the toys down into the busy yard below. How she would have loved to stay longer in each delightful place, but without a murmur she followed her guide below and back to the oak-panelled room. It looked so bare and different without the toys—much like any ordinary room.

“And now, my dear,” he said, “you must excuse me for a short time, as I must go upstairs and get ready.”

“Please, ought I to be going?” she asked politely.

“No, no. Not yet.” And he went away, up the grand staircase, to his bedroom. There he took from the drawer his scarlet fur-lined cloak and hood with wide swansdown trimming, which had been put away in lavender, chose his thickest top-boots, and humming a song, proceeded to array himself for the long, cold journey in store for him that night.

Meanwhile, the moment he left his little visitor downstairs, the strange-looking child approached her.

“What’s your name?” asked Eva pleasantly.

“Eva,” came the surly reply.

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“Why, that’s my name!”

“Of course. I know you, I know you through and through—good and bad—and I wish I didn’t.”

“You’re a horrid story-teller,” said Eva angrily.

“Supposing I am! It’s easier to tell stories than to tell the truth. Saves a lot of trouble. Besides, it’s nice. You know that as well as I do.”

Eva would have liked to deny it, only she felt too scornful. “*Saves* trouble?” she said to herself. “*Makes* trouble.” But she flushed as she remembered she had once thought that too, but only for a moment; and she was ashamed of it now. She was ruffled and uncomfortable at the proximity of this horrid girl, who now said slyly: “Look over there in that cupboard, there’s a doll that has been forgotten. I want it, and I’m going to take it and hide it under my pinafore.”

“You mayn’t—you mustn’t!” cried Eva. “It would be stealing.”

“I don’t care. Father Christmas won’t know.”

“Yes, he will. I shall tell him!”

“Then I’ll say it was given to me.”

“You horrid girl! You dreadful story-teller!”

“Don’t be silly. What does it matter telling stories and stealing, so long as you’re not found out?”

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“It’s just as bad if you’re not found out. But you are *bound* to be found out,” cried Eva, in horror and disgust as she saw her approach the coveted treasure. “I tell you, wicked people are always found out; they never escape unpunished.”

“I want it, and I’m going to have it.”

“You mustn’t. Come away—you shan’t!” shouted Eva, running after her; and she seized her by both wrists. “Come away! Oh, do come away!”

“You fool! leave me alone. Get away!” and with a scoffing laugh the girl shook herself free, sprang on a sofa, opened the cupboard, and stretched out her hand.

Without a word Eva threw herself upon her, slammed to the glass door, and in the struggle they fell together on the floor. There was a crash of broken glass, and through the noise Eva heard the voice of her opponent saying faintly: “Let me go! You have won!”

When she got up, carefully shaking the bits of glass from her frock, and looked round, the horrid little girl had disappeared. The next moment her host stood in the doorway with a curious smile on his face.

“I’m going now,” he said; “will you come?”

“Oh, please, Father Christmas,” exclaimed Eva ruefully, as she looked at the glass on the floor, “do wait! I want to explain something—I——”

FATHER CHRISTMAS AT HOME

“ I can’t keep my father waiting,” he answered gently. She followed him to the front door. There in the frosty night a beautiful sledge was in waiting, hung with baskets and sacks overflowing with toys and sweets. Father Christmas took his seat and beckoned to Eva. To her joy he lifted her on to his lap and wrapped his great coat about her. Father Time, who was on the box, shook the reins, and the two reindeer, impatient to be off, sped rapidly away amid the jangling of bells, carrying the travellers over the bridge, through the park, past holly and fir trees all powdered with glistening frost, out over the country into the bright, crisp night.

MOONLIGHT

There was Eva with Father Christmas, all snug amongst his soft furs, on his rounds. “ Why do you take some toys yourself,” she asked, “ and send others away in the great carts ? ”

“ Those in the carts are for my export and wholesale trade—shops, and so on ; these *I* take are for my special favourites. You’re on my list, my dear, you know.” Eva’s heart was full of tenderness and pride, but tears were in her eyes as she said, peering appealingly into his kind face—

“ May I whisper something ? ”

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He bent his head—and she whispered.

“Bless my soul!” was all Father Christmas replied, but he looked very pleased and jolly.

“And I should like to pay for it,” continued Eva; “I’ve got five shillings all but three farthings.”

“Never mind about that, my dear.”

“But I’m sure I ought,” she replied dubiously. “Dear Father Christmas, you are always doing kindnesses; could you tell me how to do something like giving a cot to a hospital, or a free library, or something? That’s what I really came to ask you about, only I forgot it until now. I’m so often in trouble, and I’ve so often tried to do some good, but it doesn’t come off somehow,” and she sighed.

“What you ask me is a secret,” he answered. “Some people are quick to find it out for themselves. Some people never find it out. But I will tell it to you, dear, because I know that by to-morrow you will be on the high road to guessing it. It is this: You need not give things. You needn’t try to be good. Try only not to be troublesome. If you are sweet, and gentle, and kind, you give happiness—not only do you give it, but you can then only find happiness yourself.” Somehow, it didn’t sound a bit like a sermon; it was more like being told the delightfully easy



The two reindeer . . . sped rapidly away

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FATHER CHRISTMAS AT HOME

answer to a difficult sum. Eva nestled closer to her dear old friend as she listened—it was all so peaceful, reassuring, and soothing.

The moon was shining down on the sledge and its strange occupants, and Eva was just going to ask if he could tell her who the other little girl was, and all about her, when she felt her arms were being disengaged from where they clung about him, and she found herself gently deposited on firm ground, and alone.

The Honourable Dot barked with delight because it was Christmas Eve, and it was going with its little mistress to dine downstairs; and very joyful and succulent the event proved to be. Not long after, when it was fast asleep in its basket, Eva was sitting up in bed waiting anxiously to receive the visit of her recent host. Father Christmas had done her so much good, and she wanted to tell him so, as she had had no opportunity of doing before.

She was dropping asleep in that attitude, when she heard a slight noise. Immediately she started up, and clutching tightly at a rapidly retreating figure, she laughed aloud to find she had succeeded in catching Father Christmas, who, mildly yielding to her entreaties, sat down by her side.

“I have wakened you,” he said regretfully.

“Oh no, I was waiting for you.” And she told

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him about the happy time she had spent with him, and thanked him nicely. "What a dreadful little girl that other Eva was!" she concluded. "Who was she?"

"Ah," said Father Christmas very quickly, "she is what you might be were you to give way to bad feelings. I wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, my dear!" and without explaining further he kissed her and rapidly withdrew on his business.

DAYLIGHT

Outside the uncurtained window the sun was shining. Snow had been falling softly, and was piled high on the sill. And over the hushed landscape from the far distance the Christmas bells were ringing. Eva joyfully hugged a large doll, which she had found asleep on her pillow.

It was only later, when she thought over past events in detail, that it appeared to her, though she had not paid attention to it at the time, that Father Christmas seemed ill at ease when he was *her* visitor—perhaps it was because he was in a hurry. Somehow he was different from the stout, merry-faced old gentleman she had been to see; he had strangely shrunk to nearly as thin as her own father, and as pale, comparatively, which she thought very odd.

FATHER CHRISTMAS AT HOME

And when she looked up into that wonderful and mysterious old chimney again, she saw that it was all dark and black, and as uninviting as any ordinary dirty old chimney; so that it was quite hopeless for her ever to venture up it again to find old Father Christmas “At Home.”

A BIRTHDAY STORY

IF it had not been Maisie's birthday this story could never have been written. But the day had come for her to be five years old, and, like every child of that age, she could no more help having a fifth birthday than she could imagine having it without a party. At present she was unconscious of all the delights in store, because it was only just dawn, and her curls were still tumbled about her flushed face on the pillow, and her eyes were still fast closed in sleep.

But in a small bed quite close to hers there was a little girl, who was very wide awake indeed, as she leant over with neck outstretched, gazing eagerly at all the beautiful things so temptingly displayed on a table at the foot of Maisie's cot—presents from every one in the house: Hilda's box of beads bought with her own money; a long-promised story-book resplendent in bright blue and brilliant in gold; some new furniture for the doll's house; and a something that glittered strangely—Hilda nearly toppled over in her curiosity to see it. She found it to be a big red cracker with a funny

A BIRTHDAY STORY

coloured portrait of a smirking crocodile stuck on the outside. "What lovely things!" she thought, "and all for Maisie!"

In two months' time Hilda was going to celebrate *her* birthday and be eight years old, and have a fuss made over *her*. But two whole months seemed such a long way off—such a very long time to wait! Into her dark eyes there came a strange look of envy and longing, and her handsome face with the resolute expression contrasted strangely with her sister's as she turned anxiously towards the fair little sleeper.

Holding her breath, Hilda crept slowly down on to the floor, stealthily approached the table, and seized the beautiful cracker. "Surely that would not be missed," she reflected. Just then Maisie stirred uneasily, which brought a flush of shame to the elder girl's cheeks; but hearing nothing further, Hilda jumped into bed and pushed the cracker under her own pillow. The crackling of the paper woke Maisie, who sat up, and in the middle of a big yawn espied the table, and remembered the great event. "Oh, Hilda," she exclaimed, "just look!" She was too excited as she handled her treasures to notice that Hilda never stirred, that she only answered shortly, "Yes, I know," and didn't even volunteer to say whom the beads came from.

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During the whole morning Maisie's excitement continued ; she hopped about everywhere, watching the arrangements for the afternoon party, and chattering about who were coming ; so much so, that do what she would, Hilda could obtain no opportunity of being alone so that she might satisfy her burning curiosity as to what was inside the cracker. She had dropped it behind the toy-box in the nursery, and there it lay, whilst all the time Maisie could not understand what made her sister so restless and impatient.

Immediately after lunch, however, Hilda was able to satisfy her longing at last. She picked up the cracker and hurriedly opened it. What first came to light was a big sweet wrapped in a printed motto : " Always do what is right and you will be happy." She read it with a pang of mental shame, which was quickly followed by one of physical discomfort, for she had popped the sweet into her mouth and now would as quickly have popped it out again, only it was too late, as she had already swallowed the horrid thing, which was filled with a liquid that tasted of bad scent. Making a wry face, she rolled up the offending motto into a tiny ball and threw it into the empty grate. Still, it was soothing to find in the cracker a neatly rolled up packet of pink and green paper, which evidently formed something amusing—a bonnet, a

A BIRTHDAY STORY

cap, or perhaps an apron. At the same time she drew forth the “cracking thing,” which she loved to pull and hear it go “crack.” But she always did so at arm’s length with her head turned away, and she was too frightened to pull it all by herself.

Their nurse’s voice was heard calling Maisie to come up and be dressed. Hilda, with a guilty, conscience-stricken look, had barely time to throw the useless “cracking thing” out of the open window, and to hide the rest of the cracker in the first thing at hand (which happened to be the doll’s house), when they both entered laughing and carried her off too, to be curled and be-ribboned for the party.

“I’ve seen my birthday cake, Hilda,” cried Maisie, capering about. “It’s booful!” But Hilda still tasted that nauseous liqueur from the sweet, and couldn’t enter into any pleasing ideas of cake.

Ready first, she ran into the nursery, curious as ever as to the pink and green paper bundle, took it out, unfolded it, and found that it would have formed a crown—only it didn’t join together; she had torn it in her hurry. She stamped her foot with vexation, and was wondering if she could stick the two ends together when that tiresome Maisie came running in from the next room with one of her new bronze shoes on to show how beautiful it looked. Quick as lightning Hilda had to hide her secret again.

“What are you doing with the doll’s house?

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Look at my new shoe!" exclaimed Maisie all in a breath.

And Hilda made a great fuss over the new shoe, and felt horridly out of temper.

Punctually on the stroke of three, the first of the birthday party began to arrive—two little girl cousins, who at once begged to be allowed to see if there was anything new in the doll's house. Hilda's heart sank at these words, and she tried to draw their attention away, but to no avail, for Maisie, moving towards it, said they must see the new treasure there. With difficulty and something like a scuffle Hilda, grown desperate, prevented her from opening it, and managed to do so herself, quickly stuffing the bunch of paper into her pocket without being noticed. Much admiration was bestowed on the new addition—a little motor car which had been conveniently placed in the kitchen of the doll's house ready to take out for an airing the little china lady and gentleman who sat so rigidly and smiled so vacantly in the storey above.

Meanwhile, Hilda was inwardly owning to a feeling akin to dislike for the very thought of that cracker, for the paper was bulging out her pocket, flatten it as she would. She was not happy, for never before had she done anything underhand. In fact she always tried to be an example for her young sister, and she already regretted having given way to

A BIRTHDAY STORY

the momentary impulse of envy. However, there was no time now for thoughts or remorse, and when she reached the drawing-room she forgot all about her trouble in helping to receive the guests.

Eight little girls were grouped in one corner of the room whispering, with eyes busily engaged staring at one another's sashes ; whilst eight little boys had flocked together and were looking sheepishly from out of an opposite corner. One boy, however —who had been gazing long at Hilda—with heroic resolution detached himself from his kind, and entered the rival camp, where he was welcomed with pleasure and interest. He was a young Highlander, with sandy hair and many freckles, but his attraction was great, for he wore his native costume. The jewelled hilt of a dagger showed above one plaid stocking, and on his shoulder he wore a fascinating brooch with a large brown stone, which was the envy and admiration of all the little ladies present.

Suddenly the guests were all swooped upon by a big lady, Maisie's mother, mixed up, and disentangled into couples ; a piano was set going, and they danced, hopped, and twirled about, wondering if they liked it ; the girls thought they did, and the boys were sure they didn't—all except the Scotch boy, who had constituted himself Hilda's devoted partner, and was enjoying it immensely. The polka finished, these two sat chatting merrily at the

THE RAINBOW BOOK

window, when all at once Hilda became silent. She happened to catch sight of something sticking out of the ivy on the sill. It was the “cracking thing” which she had thrown from the window above. Her partner was surprised to see her look as though she were going to cry. She didn’t dare do that.

Just then tea was announced. Weighty recollection of warnings from home-counsellors came to the minds of the children, which warnings, however, conveniently faded away at sight of the good things set forth so temptingly in the dining-room: custards, jellies, and all those concoctions beloved of the youthful interior. But the chief interest centred in Maisie’s gorgeous cake, which had her name and age flowingly written in coloured sugar, surrounded by the most realistic and sweetest of red roses imaginable, nestling in the coolest-looking golden leaves.

Hilda sat by the side of her Scotch cavalier, who had taken her in, and who was much concerned when he found that she had no appetite, but less distressed when he found that that fact did not affect his.

Once during the meal, Hilda heard their mother ask Maisie, as she helped her cut the birthday cake, what was in her cracker, and Maisie replied, as she looked up from her struggles, “What cracker?” but then, in her anxiety to know why Hilda refused to taste any of her cake till the morrow, she did not pursue the subject.

A BIRTHDAY STORY

After tea more excitement, for there was Mr. Punch and his company, who were in excellent form.

“Oi, Oi, Oi!” repeated that gentleman for the dozenth time, as he bobbed about aimlessly, in his anxiety to hit the clown and take the patient Toby between his jointless arms.

Later on, the eyelids of the party children began to grow heavy, though the eyes remained unnaturally bright ; and tempers became less even and more natural. And so, like everything else, the birthday party came to an end, and “Good-byes” were said with regret. That night cots and beds were not despised, nor did they prove unwelcome for once, for little tired heads were rested gratefully on cool pillows. Maisie was an exception ; she tossed about on hers, too happy and excited to get to sleep, whilst Hilda, worn out, lay on her back with her mouth wide open, breathing heavily, and dreaming.

Hilda dreamt that she was alone in a boat on a ruffled lake. On a white flag in the prow was a motto printed large, but upside down. She dreamt that all around the frail craft, which rocked on the stormy waters, were grinning crocodiles wearing broken crowns made of pink coral and green fluttering paper. She crouched low and tried to hide, for she knew that if the horrid creatures found her out she was lost for ever. Land was quite close, but she didn’t know how to get there, because her frock was

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made of red crackling stuff, which glistened and made a noise whenever she moved.

She felt sick with fright, and sobbed and moaned at her terrible plight, and sobbing, she woke to find that it was quite dark, that the moon was shining on Maisie smiling in her sleep, and that she herself had been dreaming.

At breakfast next morning, Maisie and their mother were already seated when Hilda silently took her place next her chattering little sister ; but it seemed to her that their mother looked unusually grave. When Hilda lifted the cover off her bread and milk bowl, Maisie suddenly looked in it and exclaimed : “ Oh, how pretty.” But Hilda turned very red, and she hung her head ashamed. For in the bowl there was no bread and milk—nothing but a crumpled red glazed paper with a hateful picture of a smiling crocodile, something pink and green, a tiny paper ball of printed paper, and a stiff thing sticking up—easily guessed at, but now blurred and indistinct to Hilda’s tearful view.

“ Oh, Maisie,” she sobbed, “ it was your crack—cracker. I—I took it from your table. Do forgive me—I’ve been so—so very miserable.”

And their mother, rising gently and saying nothing, quickly took the proofs of wrong-doing away, whilst Hilda felt Maisie’s arm creep round her neck and Maisie’s kisses on her wet cheek. . . .

A BIRTHDAY STORY

And in her repentance her fault was forgiven.

Two months later, Hilda found amongst the presents on her birthday table a lovely cracker made of silver paper with a little heart of real gold attached with a blue ribbon on the outside. And then Hilda ran and whispered eagerly in her mother's ear, who looked very pleased and kissed her. And Maisie was surprised and happy too, for Hilda put in her hand the lovely cracker with its little heart of gold for her very own to keep.

LITTLE STARRY

“I SHOULD like to go shooting, and see what the earth is like,” sighed a young star. But the Evening Star knew that meant many dangers, for down there life was not so happy or serene as up in their lofty sphere. And she knew, too, that he would go his own way as youth always does; and she felt sorry, for she did not like to part with this bright little star. And so he went. That fine crisp night the tiny star was seen to shoot right down to earth—and the light of his presence was no longer there.

A hard frost was on the ground. The shops were shut, for it was Boxing Day. Those who were not on enjoyment bent were snugly quartered by their own fireside, with the firm conviction that nothing would tempt them away. Some, however, had business to attend to in spite of its being a holiday, and old Joshua was one of these. He was known as “old” Joshua because his hair had turned prematurely white—as white as the rime which had gathered on his shabby hat as he hurried along the murky, dimly lighted street which led to

LITTLE STARRY

the great theatre. The wind that entered so unceremoniously through his thin coat was biting cold—the violin he carried was more carefully muffled up than he.

“One, two, three,” he counted, as a neighbouring clock began chiming; “four, five, six!”

He quickened his pace. He had to be in his place in the orchestra in extra good time, as it was the first night of the new pantomime. And before that, he had some one coming to meet him at the back entrance.

“I shall be there all in good time,” he muttered. “By Jupiter!” he exclaimed, as he tripped and nearly fell over something that was lying straight in his path. Only when he stooped down did he discover that on the pavement lay a small child, all cold to the touch, with fair curls dishevelled, and eyes wide open that seemed to see nothing.

Old Joshua’s heart filled with pity and indignation. “What a shame,” he muttered, “to abandon such a treasure as this! And no one about who can help me.” He looked anxiously around—no one was in sight; so he hurriedly went in search of a policeman. When he had succeeded in finding one, and the two reached the spot together, a crowd had collected and was gazing wonderingly at the tiny, prostrate form.

THE RAINBOW BOOK

“Stand back there!” commanded the man of law.

The clock chimed the quarter-hour. Old Joshua felt the cold no more—he was in a nervous heat at the delay; nevertheless, he waited till a cab was hailed. Then the policeman tenderly lifted the helpless little creature into it, and the driver wrapped his rug around it. “To the ‘orspital!” directed the policeman, stepping inside, and the vehicle was driven smartly away. The crowd dispersed, and with it old Joshua, as quickly as he could hurry through the throng.

At the stage door he found his little Stella awaiting him with sparkling eyes, in anticipation of her annual treat.

“Daddy, you’re late,” she said, holding up a finger in mock gravity; then she clapped her hands with delight at his arrival.

Old Joshua would not distress her with the cause of his delay, so he only stooped and kissed her. “Give me your hand, old lady,” he said, “and come along quickly. Through this door—that’s right. Up you go. Don’t step on my poor toes or push against me when we turn the corner more than you can help, or old Daddy Joshua and his fiddle might be a little out of tune!” And, laughing as they went, they climbed right up to the top back row of the vast empty theatre. There

LITTLE STARRY

a smiling attendant welcomed her as quite an old little friend, and when he had seen his daughter raised up on a seat by means of a big hassock, old Joshua, with a nod of thanks, hastened below to join his comrades of the orchestra, and help create the squeaky din which they called “tuning up.”

At last the lights were turned up. An eager troop of pleasure-seekers tumbled into the gallery in a rush, and while Stella was looking around her every available seat was quickly occupied. The other parts of the house were filling rapidly in more dignified style, and soon every place was tenanted in honour of the great Christmas pantomime. The large orchestra struck up, and when the overture was over the gorgeously painted curtain slowly rose.

Stella, perched up aloft, forgot where she was, and everything else in the world went straight out of her head as she gazed with rapture at the lovely scene that was peopled with fairies, and goblins, and wonderful beings, disporting themselves in a land that was all glitter and gold. And so the hours flew by, in a wonder of loveliness, fairy story, and fun.

“ ‘Ave a bit o’ orange, dearie?” asked the stout woman who was sitting next to her. But Stella was too engrossed to think about oranges or neighbours, nor even did she feel the light nudge that

THE RAINBOW BOOK

followed. The woman merely turned to her husband, smiled, and held her peace; while Stella threw back her head and shook with laughter, as the Clown tickled Pantaloons with a poker that looked extremely red hot. She wasn't a bit tired, and was quite surprised to hear "God Save the King," and to find the whole beautiful show was already over, like a dream. It had seemed to her as though it must go on for ever.

Flushed and excited, and a good deal jostled by the moving crowd, she made her way to the staircase in order to meet the motherly attendant on the next landing, who had promised to take her to her father at the stage door. Stella was walking down carefully step by step, when two young men came roughly tearing past her. A sudden push threw her off her balance. She knew she screamed because she heard it. Then she knew and heard nothing more.

Great fun was going forward in the biggest ward in the Children's Hospital. Father Christmas had suddenly appeared amidst much cheering and clapping of hands. Not only were the little inmates, the nurses, and young doctors beaming with smiles, but Father Christmas himself felt the glow of jollity as he busily handed the toys he carried to his two attendant clowns. These nimble, funny

LITTLE STARRY

fellows ran from him to the cots, backwards and forwards, giving such beautiful toys, and saying such funny things as they gave them, that every child was soon laughing and happy, even those with a bandaged head or limb, or a pain inside or outside ; and the unwonted excitement brought a flush to their pale cheeks and brightness to their eyes.

But none of the jollification was seen by the new little inmate of the cot that was in the far corner. A tiny blind boy lay there, with pretty, fair curls, and large dark eyes that he turned pathetically around. He had not spoken at all. Earlier in the evening he had shivered much, and groaned. Now he lay peacefully smiling, for his small hands held a musical-box that Father Christmas himself had placed there, and set working, and the tinkle-tinkle of a pretty tune seemed to please and soothe him.

When the Christmas visitors had gone away, and the dolls had been hushed to sleep by their new mothers, and the woolly animals lay hugged tightly in the arms of drowsy owners, a little girl in a swoon from an accident was carried into the ward. The sprained ankle had been dressed ; quietly and quickly she was put to bed, and consciousness soon returned.

“ Where am I ? ” said Stella, staring about her.

THE RAINBOW BOOK

“You fell down, dear,” replied Nurse Evelyn, “and we are taking care of you until you are fetched home. You’ll soon be all right again. Does your ankle hurt much? Don’t move it.”

“It feels funny,” replied Stella, “but doesn’t hurt now it is still—thank you very much,” she added, staring about her in amazement at the strange faces, the holly in the strange surroundings, at the nurses in their pretty costumes with their white caps and aprons, and at the sleeping children clutching their toys. In the cot next to hers, however, the little fair-haired boy looked awake. His eyes in their aimless wandering were now fixed on the high window through which the stars were twinkling at him, and the Evening Star looked fixedly down upon him. His hands lay listlessly on the polished wooden box. The music had changed, and in his ear it sang of “Angels ever bright and fair.”

Stella, who was watching him with so much interest, asked who he was.

“He is a little foundling,” said Nurse Evelyn. “He was abandoned in the cold streets.”

Stella turned her head on the pillow towards him again, and asked timidly—

“Are you better?”

“Talk to him to-morrow, dear,” advised Nurse Evelyn.

LITTLE STARRY

As she gazed at him Stella thought she had never seen so beautiful a child. She stretched out her arm and took his tiny palm in hers; then he turned his face towards her and smiled, contentedly and trustingly leaving his hand in hers. And thus with love and pity in her heart she fell fast asleep.

And in the night she saw a wonderful thing—a moonbeam that seemed to come down into the room—the small hand in hers unloosed itself, and the boy arose looking gloriously beautiful; his eyes were shining, and he could see the bright light, and he began climbing up the beam, so easily that it looked like gliding, so happily now that he could see his way and whither it was leading him.

The next morning Stella's first thought was of the lovely vision, and of her little companion. She turned over and looked with surprise. The cot in the corner was empty—so very empty, and tidy with its smoothed fresh sheets.

“Oh, where's he gone?” she exclaimed.

Nurse hurried to her side. “Who, dear?”

“There—from the empty cot.”

The Nurse looked sweet and grave. “He has gone where he came from, dear.”

“And where did he come from?” asked Stella, with a curious sense of loneliness.

“Where all children come from.”

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Of course, Stella knew that all children are Heaven-born, and come from the stars. Why, her own name meant a star. And, of course, she also knew that every one who was good some day went back again to Heaven.

“Oh,” she cried, in a hushed voice, “has he gone back There?”

“Yes, dear,” replied Nurse Evelyn gently. “Now, don’t think of him any more. Here’s a pretty book with pictures.”

But Stella did think of him, a great deal more. The little golden-haired boy occupied her thoughts more than any one ever knew. And that night, and many other nights, when she looked upwards at the vast sky, so mysterious and serene with its millions of stars, she would wonder and ponder. And there was always one particular little star that she loved best, and when she looked upon it a sweetness would steal into her heart, and she would think of the gentle boy with the angel face, who had gone back to Heaven—for she felt quite sure that he was there amongst them, and that he could see her, and that, perhaps, he loved her.

And all to herself she called him Little Starry—and she remembered him always.

CEDRIC'S UNACCOUNTABLE ADVENTURE

PART I

CEDRIC was flying his kite in a flowery meadow close to his home in Cornwall. It was a favourite spot of his, for he was a boy who loved beautiful scenery, and from there he could get a glimpse of Land's End, with its great rocks around which the waves frothed and gambolled, broke, and gurgled away.

The day was grey and windy, just the sort of day for flying a kite. This kite was of the old-fashioned sort, with a tail of his own making, and as it soared away higher and higher, with the tail wriggling its great length like a happy eel on a holiday, his heart was full of pride and content.

He kept on unwinding and unwinding the large ball of string until he began to wonder if his kite would still be in view by the time he had unwound it all. The wind was increasing in strength, when, to his astonishment, and apparently for no reason at all, the pull on his arm suddenly relaxed, and

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the kite all at once dropped quickly to earth, tail first. Cedric darted forward to where it lay, some distance ahead. When he reached it, he flung himself alongside to examine it carefully. He could find no rent, no damage; nothing was wrong. There was nothing, apparently, to account for such peculiar behaviour in his hitherto well-conducted kite.

As he passed his hand over it where it lay, he felt underneath it, entangled in the tail, something hard. He could see it glistening through. He quickly drew it forth, and found in his hand—a golden key.

“ Halloa ! what’s this ? ” exclaimed Cedric, as he knelt down and turned his discovery over and over. “ A yellow key. However did it get there ? ” was his next thought. He continued to ask himself the riddle, but finding no answer he gave it up, and carefully examined the key. There was no mark on it—it wouldn’t even whistle when he tried it. “ Some one must have lost it, I suppose,” he went on, and concluded : “ Well, it’s no use to me ! ” and he threw it away. Seating himself on the grass, he soon became absorbed in getting his kite all trim again, and had temporarily secured the string to a bush, when his attention was attracted by the key, which lay and glistened as if it knew it was glistening.

CEDRIC'S ADVENTURE

Cedric didn't care to trouble with it, but instinctively he picked it up, and said—

“I wonder where this key belongs to?”

At that moment his view of the Land's End became slowly obscured by a huge iron door, the lock of which was outlined with gold. He tried the key he held. *It fitted!* A turn, the heavy door was unlocked, and he put the key in his pocket. He turned the handle, pushed the door open just enough to squeeze through, and it swung to behind him.

There had been a great commotion in Fairyland. The gnomes—who formed the Opposition Party—had turned disloyal and wanted a republic; whereupon the King, hurt in his dignity, insisted upon abdicating. In fact, he was tired of power, and glad of the excuse to resign. In spite of the prayers and entreaties of those who desired him to remain in office he returned to the Treasury the Golden Key, together with the crown and other royal jewels, and, to the concern of every one who wasn't a gnome, went forth to play skittles—his sole interest and only hobby.

Of all the regalia, the most precious object was the Golden Key, for whoever held it was made King of Fairyland by virtue of its possession; and it was ordained that it could only be parted with at

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the monarch's free will. It could be surrendered ; it could not be withdrawn.

So the old King deposited it in the Treasury, leaving his people—the faithful and unfaithful alike—to fight out the matter as best they could. In so doing they fought their very best. The quarrel between the gnomes and the fairies waxed furious in their patriotic eagerness to get their own way. But while blows were exchanged and relations were otherwise strained, and the Monarchs, generally speaking, were highly annoyed, and the Republicans were even more perturbed, the latter suddenly lay low, and hatched an audacious plot. So daring was it that it made their grotesque and stunted little bodies tremble as they thought of it, and their gnarled feet shook in their shoes.

This plot involved nothing less than the theft of the Golden Key. The symbol of royalty was to be taken to the mountain top and flung far away outside the boundaries of Fairydom, and a republic proclaimed and acclaimed. A monarchy could no longer be possible.

Meanwhile the guileless fairies, recking nothing of this, and rejoicing in what they thought to be the discomfiture of their adversaries, chose the popular Crown Princess for the succession, and began with much pomp and circumstance the cere-



Lay low, and hatched an audacious plot

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CEDRIC'S ADVENTURE

mony of investing her with the Golden Key. They had proceeded up to a certain point when, to their horror and amazement, on opening the treasure chamber to bear the symbol in solemn procession upon a velvet cushion, as the law demanded, they discovered that *the Golden Key was gone!*

Cedric suddenly guessed that he possessed the key to Fairyland. For he found himself in a sun-bathed valley with clouds of rainbow hues in the azure sky above. In the distance he beheld a rippling lake of golden water, on the borders of which stood a palace made of gems gathered from the circling mountains which stood as sentinels around the valley. Down these mountains meandered little golden rills that fed the lake. Nothing stirred but gaily coloured birds, which fluttered amongst the blossoming fruit trees and the rich and dainty flowers.

All around the lake, as though from nowhere, sprang crowds of fairies, gnomes, pixies, and sprites; they were landing from the tiny flower-decked craft, forming processions, hurrying in and out of the palace—presenting to Cedric's astonished gaze a scene of wonderful animation and pretty bustle. Great preparations were apparently proceeding.

After a time they gathered together in waiting

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crowds, which stretched a long distance on either side of the approach to the shimmering edifice, and the words came to him with curious distinctness—

“Hail! Cedric, King of Fairyland!”

“K-K-King of Fairyland!” stammered the boy in bewilderment. “Am I King of Fairyland? You’re only making fun—I’ve only been flying my kite: I can’t be a king.”

“Of course your young Majesty has got the key?” remarked a funny little old man at his elbow.

“Yes,” replied Cedric, starting at the suddenness of the answer to his question, but vastly surprised, and amused too, at the quaint way in which he was addressed.

“Very well, then. Of course we all know you must have found it, or you couldn’t be here. I’d far rather you had it than I; experience has taught me that much. Good morning, young gentleman; may it bring you more pleasure than it brought me,” and with a chuckle the little old man bowed himself away.

Cedric had no time to think, for a gorgeous equipage stopped just in front of him. The door flew open; the boy, guessing what was expected of him, quickly stepped inside, and, wondering at this grandeur, the new King of Fairyland was borne swiftly through the serried ranks of his bowing



“Of course your young Majesty has got the key?”

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CEDRIC'S ADVENTURE

subjects to the doors of his magnificent palace. Soldiers presented arms, a national air was played on lutes and harps, and Cedric passed through the gates, followed by as many of the populace as had tickets of admission to witness the most wonderful coronation you never saw.

PART II

In the throne-room, on a throne of diamonds, Cedric sat in royal robes, and on his head was a golden crown, which had been taken, as being about his size, from the dome of the Crown Palace. Grouped near him were the aristocracy of Fairy-land—prominent among them the Crown Princess, and her great friend and neighbour, the Queen of Gossamerland, both young, both beautiful, and both unmarried.

When the ceremony was over, and the shout, “Hail! Cedric, King of Fairyland!” echoed once more, the boy, prompted by the Lord High Chamberlain, rose and bowed his delighted acknowledgments, while the crowds outside cheered for all they were worth. He kept standing, in order to receive the general homage, with the quiet confidence of one who had been used to that sort of thing every day of his life.

Little did he guess that the populace of Fairyland, who were acclaiming him, down to the tiniest

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sprite, were far from pleased to have a mortal on their throne—that the gnomes were plotting, *with* the fairies this time, to depose him, for the key had come back to their land, and was never likely to be stolen again. They had all put their heads together how to make Cedric part with it of his own free will, according to law, and they knew they had to accomplish their end by their wits, as no other means held good. It was their desire now to elect their ruler by putting the matter to the country to vote, and thus please both parties. The gnomes, who had had time to consider it, were dumbfounded at their stupidity in having thrown the key into Mortal-land, and they regretted it when it was too late.

A fair lady, wearing a tiny crown, stepped forward and curtsied low before her monarch. It was the Crown Princess. Cedric wanted to detain her; but it wasn't etiquette, and she smiled to herself as she swept past with her maids of honour. She was followed by her dark friend, who kissed Cedric's hand. Her face was more beautiful than any he had ever beheld. In obedience to his wish that she should speak to him, the little Queen of Gossamerland smiled and said—

“Sire, I have often heard of mortals, but never saw one before. It is said that some of them never dream of coming to our country, that others often

CEDRIC'S ADVENTURE

do, but they never come really, you know. Your Majesty is the very first. Will you graciously tell me how it feels?"

Cedric laughed, and coughed nervously, and replied that "it felt very pleasant and comfor'ble."

She turned her head as she withdrew, and whispered anxiously—

"Do not part with the Golden Key, as you value your throne."

The words, and still more the impressive and forceful manner, of the dazzling little Queen puzzled him. He determined, nevertheless, to follow advice so fatefully given, but he couldn't help pondering over it; and his face was graver as he bowed to the lords and ladies and high-born gnomes who had the honour of introduction.

Escorted by the whole of the brilliant company, King Cedric left his palace in order formally "to do some good deed"—which was a part of the ancient ceremonial. He was to open a new institution for fairies who had lost their arts and crafts and livelihoods too. When they arrived at the building it was announced that the key which was to have been presented to him was not forthcoming. Consternation, real or assumed—(*Cedric* didn't believe in it)—followed on the strange declaration of those who were responsible for the carelessness. Amid profuse apologies, the Lord

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High Chamberlain begged the King that he would use the Golden Key—which, being a master key, could of course take the place of any other.

Acting on the advice given him, and alive to the evident importance of retaining the key (which was also the key to his position), Cedric politely and graciously refused: at which there was considerable sensation. Arguments and persuasion were in vain, but at last he yielded to the entreaties of those needy fairies who badly wanted their institution. Himself he inserted the key, which was found to fit, as was to be expected. But when he wanted to withdraw it, it had stuck, and was immovable—the lock had been carefully arranged that it should be so. Triumph and amusement were on every face except his.

“I have been betrayed,” muttered Cedric, and he wondered what on Fairyland he should do next. There was silence—a breathless interval—during which the boy never relaxed hold on his treasured possession.

“Cut away the lock!” he commanded. At this order the people murmured loudly, but soon fell into silence; for they were bound by their constitution to obey their monarch. In a few moments the Golden Key was again safe in Cedric’s pocket, and mistrust was in his heart, as it has been in that of nearly every king who ever reigned.

CEDRIC'S ADVENTURE

The coronation ceremony was over, and the company had dispersed, so Cedric found himself at liberty to saunter forth. He hadn't proceeded more than a few yards in the brilliant landscape when a Rabbit—renowned for his white gloves—bounded up to him and humbly begged it might be his Majesty's pleasure to receive some famous members of Animal Fairyland who were anxious to render homage. Cedric replied royally with a dignified nod, and followed the creature as it led the way to a clearing in a forest close by. Here, explained the Rabbit, the animals were allowed full liberty to say what they pleased—but beyond the boundaries they were only able to make strange noises which their own families alone could understand: it was thus that the secrets of Fairyland were kept from the world outside.

Upon a throne made from a cutting of the famous beanstalk grown for the original Jack King Cedric seated himself, and awaited events.

He hadn't long to wait, for a Fox trotted up and bade him welcome to Animal Fairyland. Wonderfully tactful for his age, Cedric told the Fox that he recognised him, having read about him in Grimm's tales, and remarked—

“You were so good, Mr. Fox, to the poor horse!”

At which the Fox sniggered shyly and withdrew.

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This pleasing reminiscence gave unbounded satisfaction to the various animals that had quickly gathered around.

Cedric's inquiry of the Wolf as to his digestion after that little flirtation with Red Riding Hood's grandmother was also considered prodigiously appropriate, and was greeted with cordial appreciation. His quick recognition, too, of the Three Bears added greatly to his popularity, but he wasn't so happy in his remark to a stately Swan who came up and bowed.

"You're glad to have got rid of those ducks, I s'pose?" he observed.

"And pray, sire, where did you hear about that? It's a chapter of my early history I hoped had never got about!"

"Oh, I have read all about the Ugly Duckling!" replied Cedric, persuaded that the information would fill the Swan with pride.

"Why, you don't mean to say—! Do you—do you tell me that—" screamed the Swan furiously, almost choked with indignation, and it could not finish its sentences. Then in a quieter, but still in an angry, voice, it continued: "To think of it! Why, I plumed myself on its having been kept out of print! So that family scandal has got round after all!" And in defiance of all etiquette, the swan turned tail and waddled off.

CEDRIC'S ADVENTURE

“The audience is over!” cried Cedric indignantly.

Whereupon the deputation hastily withdrew.

“Guide, sire?” inquired a gnome, suddenly presenting himself and going down on one knee. “Guide to the fairy ring?”

“Yes, please,” and he followed him to where a number of peacocks stood on guard with their tails magnificently spread.

“Have you twopence?” asked the guide anxiously.

“I’m not sure,” answered Cedric, fumbling in his pocket.

“If not, I’m afraid you can’t be let in, sire.” The gnome was looking afraid that the king might not fall, after all, into the little trap he was preparing.

“Not let me in? Can’t I order myself through?”

“No ‘paper’ allowed! You can only be let in by paying the entrance fee.”

“I never heard of a king paying twopence to go in anywhere,” said Cedric, drawing himself up. He was not unreasonable, he felt, but he was a little hurt in his dignity as sovereign.

“I’m afraid your Majesty can’t go against the Office of Works.”

“S’pose I ordered the peacocks to be removed,” said Cedric, growing hot at the undignified posi-

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tion of a monarch unable to produce the price of a Bath bun ; “ s’pose I ordered their necks to be wrung, or something ? ”

“ It would be deplorably irregular and excessively unconstitutional.”

Cedric was taken at a disadvantage by the length of the words ; but a lucky discovery relieved him.

“ Here, I’ve got four ha’pennies. But I call it mean that I, of all people, shouldn’t be allowed in free.”

“ It’s simply to show the person is well off, and to keep the place select—it’s the same for all. In the case of royalty the amount is returned in cash at the end of the performance.”

Cedric entered alone, and found the fairy ring far beyond anything he could have dreamed of. Thousands of little fairies, wearing cunning arrangements of petals from the fruit blossoms, had joined hands and were dancing round joyously, raising tiny clouds of yellow dust, which enveloped them as with a golden mist. As he came in sight they burst into song, and manœuvring cleverly until he was in their midst, they showed what they could do in grace of movement and harmony of sound, till, quite enchanted, he felt he could remain there for ever.

“ Go on ! go on ! ” he shouted, clapping his hands with delight, for the little crew had come to a standstill.

CEDRIC'S ADVENTURE

A pixie detached himself, and kneeling, begged his Majesty to give him the Golden Key.

“What for?” asked Cedric, surprised.

“To wind up the proceedings,” came the reply of the fairies, who had eagerly drawn near.

“Can’t,” said Cedric.

“*Do!*” said the prettiest of the fairies in chorus.

Hardly knowing what he was about, so much did he want to see the entrancing dance all over again, he held out the key to the applicant; but, noticing a peculiar gleam dart from the pixie’s eyes, he quickly snatched it back again and replaced it in his pocket, and coming to himself found that the peacocks were once more between him and the fairy ring; that twopence was in his hand, and there was no one at all about. Then he realised how narrow his escape had been. “Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.” Cedric knew that Shakespeare had written that; but he had never expected to learn the truth of it from experience.

He lay on the grass, and pondered what he had better do in the trying political situation. “What’s the use of being King of Fairyland if I have to be plotted against every hour of the day?” muttered Cedric disconsolately.

“No use at all.”

They were the soft tones of the little Queen of

THE RAINBOW BOOK

Gossamerland. She sat down next to him and put her tiny hand on his arm.

“What’s to be done, then?”

“It’s very simple,” she rejoined. “Give me the Golden Key. You’ll be king no longer, but you’ll have no responsibilities or anxieties.”

“That won’t be much fun for me,” replied Cedric. “Besides, what will you do with it?”

“The right thing. I’ll give it to the Crown Princess, the rightful heir. That will save the country a general election, and fairy tranquillity will reign once more.”

“Why did you warn me not to part with it? And now you ask me for it!”

“I wanted to get it myself as soon as you would give it up, so that I might deliver it to my dear friend, who will become a queen like me. Then she can choose her husband; and, after being her bridesmaid, I suppose I shall be married too.”

“Will you marry me?” asked Cedric bluntly.

“Why, you’d have to live on honey!” replied the Gossamer Queen, with a smile, half sweet, half malicious. Cedric turned it over in his mind, but not for long.

“Give me the key,” she begged coaxingly.

“Yes—but,” argued the boy, “it’s worth a lot, you know: I wouldn’t so much mind swopping it; but——”

CEDRIC'S ADVENTURE

The Queen of Gossamerland, tired of wasting time, put out her hand so prettily, and pursed up her lips so sweetly and daintily, that he *did* give her the Golden Key, and she gave a kiss as a receipt. Then she said that the Office of Works would send for the crown, and flitted away.

Cedric prepared to remove his crown, with a sigh to think he had no longer any right to it, but first he ran to the stream that slowly floated by, and took a good look at himself. He smiled with pride. "I must say," he remarked confidentially to himself, "I really do look every inch a king! But, after all, I couldn't go to school with this on—the fellows would be sure to notice it." He started at the bare idea, and laid down the crown with a feeling of "good riddance" as profound and grateful as ever King James II. could have experienced. He felt no other pang than that of dignity too quickly swept away.

He placed it on the grass, confident that the Gossamer Queen would send for it at once, and he began to think of his own return. "Now to find that door!" he exclaimed, and looked about him to ask the way. The golden lake, the glittering palace, the sentry of mountains—all were there; but no living being was in sight.

"Queer place, *I* call it," said Cedric to himself. "No cake shops, only honey, and no policemen

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to tell the way.” He wandered on in the hope of coming sooner or later, somehow and somewhere, to the door.

After a time he met the funny little old man who had accosted him on his arrival. He was gazing hard at the boy, looking right through him as though he were not there.

“Will you kindly show me the door?” said Cedric eagerly.

“Turn you out, do you mean?” asked ex-King the First.

“I want to turn myself out, if I can,” replied Cedric.

“Already? Good morning, young gentleman, ex-King the Second. There’s a pair of us.”

“Please show me the door.”

“When is a door not a-jar?” asked the out-o’-work sovereign.

“Don’t ask me riddles. Show me the door!” ordered Cedric in his best royal-command manner, and looked so threatening that the little old man quickly pointed over his shoulder.

Cedric walked off in that direction without a word, and to his joy he discovered the door just a little way in front of him.

“Thank goodness!” he exclaimed, as he ran up to it—and then he suddenly realised that he no longer possessed the Golden Key with which to open it. How was he to escape? He turned and



"I really do look every inch a king!"

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CEDRIC'S ADVENTURE

looked back at what now was an immeasurable distance—so very far away did it seem—and there was once more bustling activity about the palace. Another Coronation ceremony was beginning all over again.

The boy flung himself against the door, and banged and kicked at it with all his might. It was of no use.

“Oh, the key, the key!” he cried. “If they would only spare it from their silly triumphing for a moment, and let me out !”

He put his eye to the keyhole, and with longing gaze he saw his kite on the spot he had left it, with its lazy tail gently stirred by the breeze.

Once more he looked back, despairing of help ; the same animated fairy scene met his gaze—all so indifferent to his helplessness. Grasping the handle of the door in his hand he shook it in desperation.

Then he remembered. He quietly turned the handle, and walked out !

The sea breeze blew freshly as Cedric freed his kite from the bush, and when he looked back there was Land's End just as he had seen it before. “And Fairyland's end, too,” he muttered ; for all trace of the iron door had disappeared after he passed through. He stared in astonishment, and couldn't make it out ; and the adventure remained a mystery all the days of his life.

ROSELLA

“ ROSELLA !”

“ Yes, Mother ?” And a dark-eyed little girl looked down over the banisters into the hall.

“ I want you to get ready quickly and go to the Moat House, and persuade Grandfather to come back with you this afternoon instead of waiting until the evening.”

“ But if he invites me to tea with him ?”

“ Don’t stay, dearie. I want you back before dusk, and it gets dark so soon now ; and you must help me to tie the crackers on the Christmas-tree. It’s still sunny, so make haste.”

In a few minutes the child was tripping downstairs, smart and cosy in her red coat, hat, and muff, with all the importance of her nine years.

“ Go the shortest way—you know ; keep to the path across the moor,” continued her mother, “ or you might fall over bits of rock under the snow.”

“ Do you know, Mother, I always wonder, when there’s snow, where all the grass is and what’s underneath ? All killed by the freeze ?”

ROSELLA

“Oh no. The snow keeps everything nice and warm,” replied her mother with a kiss.

Davis, the portly butler, advanced and opened the front door.

“Being *above* the snow doesn’t keep *me* nice and warm, Mother,” called back Rosella as she ran laughing down the steps into the icy north wind, which blew her dark hair out to its full length and heightened the warm colour in her cheeks.

“Make haste, and you’ll be there in half-an-hour.” Mrs. Silverton returned to her boudoir, and standing at the bow-window followed with loving eyes the graceful little red figure, until at a bend in the road it turned, gaily waved a farewell, and was lost to sight.

When Rosella reached the moor the high wind was against her, blowing her frock between her knees and making her eyes water. “This way will be very difficult and unpleasant,” she thought to herself. “I’d far rather go round by the hill, and then, too, I could see if Grandfather has got the Snow Castle on the top finished and ready for to-morrow—I forgot about that when Mother said to go across the moor. I should so like to see it—I wonder if I might!”

She stood irresolute for a moment, then left the straight path and started running, in order to save time, in the other direction: thus making for the hill which she intended to climb.

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The sun became obscured, and what was worse, down from the leaden yellow sky tiny snowflakes began to flutter as though in play, rapidly increasing in size and volume until, as if by magic, Rosella found herself enveloped in a blinding snowstorm that obscured the landscape, and decided her to return home. But returning home was not so easy as turning herself round, and she soon had the growing conviction that no matter which way she turned she was lost, utterly lost : for all that she could see was that she no longer seemed to be dressed in red, but was thickly coated in white.

Twice she tripped over the uneven ground, but she stumbled along hopefully and bravely, and even tried to sing, only the snowflakes got into her mouth and made her shut it up tight.

Rosella had no idea where she was, and she felt very tired. How she wished now she had gone straight forward ! There would have been no difficulty about that. By good luck she came close up to a large piece of overhanging rock ; she did not remember ever seeing it before, so she was more than ever confused as to the whereabouts of the hill or of anything ; but it was good for shelter. She placed her muff in a niche above her head, and sat down to rest awhile and consider what she had best do.

The wind howled around her only partially

ROSELLA

sheltered retreat, and myriads of snowflakes, drifting in, fell softly about her, creeping closer and closer, covering her boots, lying thickly on her frock, on her shoulders, drifting, too, into her eyes and making them blink, and powdering her hair with white. And she felt too cold to think —too cold to move.

After a while Rosella exclaimed: “This won’t do. I must get up from here. It’s such a dreadfully cold place!” And she determined to try and go on, if only to keep herself warm. So she shook herself, took down her muff, and went forth.

It was snowing as much as ever, but Rosella found that the ground was no longer flat. She was on the hillside, and as she climbed she wondered anxiously how she should know which side to come down, once she was on the top, in order to find the Moat House. Then she smiled as it occurred to her how much she must now look like the tiny, red-hooded, toy figure in the glass paper weight at home which showed itself enveloped in a miniature snowstorm when it was shaken. She plodded on higher and higher.

The weather was clearing when Rosella stood on the summit of the hill, and she was lost in admiration as she gazed at the largest, grandest Snow Castle she could never have imagined.

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Before it, too, stood a Snow Man splendidly proportioned and set up. To her intense astonishment, as she timidly approached he bowed politely.

Rosella curtsied instinctively, then laughed as she went round to see where he had broken. But he wasn't broken at all, for he turned too, faced her, and said—

“I need hardly introduce myself, Rosella. I presume you recognise King Frost when you meet him in any guise. You wished to see my Castle—and gave yourself a polite invitation. You are welcome!”

She was so taken aback with the suddenness of all this that she could find no words for reply. So she made another, much lower, curtsey, which she knew to be correct in the presence of Royalty, then she took his proffered arm. And the tall white figure and the little white figure mounted the white steps, went through the massive gateway, and proceeded down a long, narrow passage lighted with a ruddy glow from the high windows, which were glazed with something red, transparent, and glistening. It was much warmer here, and Rosella noticed that the snow had melted from her clothes, and that her companion also appeared to be dressed in red. His white face with its white beard and white hair wore quite a jovial

ROSELLA

air, and on top of it was set a crown of carved ice that reminded her of their chandelier in the drawing-room.

He did the honours by offering her some snow broth, which she declined. Then she thought she ought to say something, so she remarked, with a touch of family pride—

“I had no idea that Grandfather had built such a fine place as this.”

“*I* think the credit is entirely mine,” protested her companion with an amused chuckle. “*I* provide the material, you see, or there would have been no ‘fine place’ at all. See my point?”

“Yes, your Majesty,” she assented, for she knew it wasn’t polite to argue—especially with a royal personage.

“This way!” he exclaimed, and led her down another passage on the right, and halted to push open a swing door of ice a little way, and genially patted her on the cheek—which was kindly meant no doubt, but his touch nipped her with cold so that she shivered.

“I shall be on guard outside. If you want me, call me!” Almost as soon as she heard the words the heavy door swung to behind her, and she found herself alone in a great, white, glistening hall with high arches open to the air. Evidently it was

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scarcely snowing now, for only little isolated flakes came fluttering in. But in their falling they changed into little shadowy girls and boys in white, who danced playfully around her, and their cold white draperies swept lightly about her face, reminding her of the blinding snowstorm she had passed through. But she only wanted to get away to her grandfather now.

Rosella sheltered her face with her muff and ran the gauntlet of the persistent little snowflakes. In a corner she espied a spiral staircase which seemed to lead up into one of the battlemented towers she had noticed outside, and she imagined it a way of escape, so up she ran. The steps were very slippery, but she got up to the top, where, through a narrow loophole, she saw King Frost down below, standing there just as she first saw him when she thought him only a Snow Man. More anxious than ever to know how to get to her grandfather, she called out—

“Your Majesty!” and repeated loudly the two words over and over again, for he either would not or could not hear her. And what was very curious, there was an echo which called back “Rosella! Rosella!” in the same anxious tone.

Talking was clearly of no use; she must do something. So she tried to squeeze her muff through the aperture in order to drop it on his head and

ROSELLA

attract his attention—but it would not go through. It stuck there and closed out her view. Try as she would she could not release it; and with a gulp in her throat she realised she would have to leave it. Her hands grew terribly cold without it, and it was too draughty to remain there.

From the landing on which she stood steps led up higher, so she proceeded to explore, and found herself in an octagonal turret chamber. “I suppose it serves me right, and *I am* lost, *and* there’s no one to help me!” sighed Rosella.

“Oh yes there is!”

“Whose voice is that?” she asked. She could see no one—but at the same moment a sunbeam pierced through an aperture, pointed straight at what appeared to be a lift behind a slender column, and then faded away. It *was* a lift, made of ice and snow, as was everything else in the Castle. Rosella entered it and took a seat. The lift at once began gently and slowly to go down, down, first into the foundations of the Castle, and then into the interior of the hill right down under the snow, till it stopped in a Grotto lined with cobwebs and suffused with a mysterious green light. There was a soft, singing sound, as though made by the wind. In front was a frozen lake, and the ice of it was green from the same strange light.

“I must try and find my way to Grandfather,”

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said Rosella vaguely as she wandered about the Grotto, looking about her for a way out.

Mrs. Silverton kept glancing anxiously at the clock and at the snowstorm. Davis entered. "Madam," said he, with an usually solemn face, "Mr. Silverton has telephoned again from the Moat House that Miss Rosella hasn't arrived."

"Then she must have lost her way!" exclaimed her mother, now thoroughly alarmed. "Though I don't see how she could, keeping straight across the moor to the Moat House gate at the end of the path. We must set out, Davis, and find her."

"Difficult this weather, Madam, if our young lady is lost on the moor."

"Is it still so bad?"

"The storm's not so thick as it was. I'll go immediately. There's no time to be lost, to my thinking, Madam."

"Yes, we'll go at once, Davis."

Mrs. Silverton, pale with anxiety, sent other messengers in various directions, and then started off herself. On the moor she met another search party headed by old Mr. Silverton and his faithful collie dog. And the moor rang with anxious cries of "Rosella! Rosella!" uttered by whitened shadowy figures that looked like phantoms in the falling snow.

ROSELLA

“I *must* try and find my way to Grandfather,” repeated Rosella falteringly, realising that she didn’t know in the least how to proceed. She never had a notion that a Snow Castle was so intricate inside, with a hall, a lift, a grotto, and things; indeed, she had always imagined for no particular reason that it had no inside at all; “but of course,” she now argued, “if it has an outside it *must* have an inside, or it wouldn’t be an outside.” But it was much more startling when she looked up and found that she was by no means alone: the cobwebs were all inhabited. Inhabited—not by ugly spiders, but by the wee-est little baby-fairies with the wee-est gossamer wings, swaying in their cobweb hammocks in all attitudes, fast asleep, soothed by the lullaby hummed by the wind.

“This must be where they are bred!” cried Rosella, in an ecstasy of admiration and delight.

“This is Fairy Spring’s nursery,” explained a beautiful Sprite, appearing suddenly at her elbow like a little bright sunbeam. “King Frost is the ground landlord, you know, and allows all her young things to sleep here and keep warm.”

“And who are you, please?” inquired the Sprite’s young visitor.

“I am Love of Goodwill, and my father’s name is Christmas.”

“I know you by name quite well, and am so

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glad to see you. Perhaps you would kindly help me to find my way ? ”

“ If you keep on going to the right, when you see the snowdrops’ mother, there you will find your landmark.”

“ Oh, do please tell me more clearly. What did you say ? Tell me where I ”—but Rosella was again alone in the green grotto with the sleeping baby-fairies in their swaying hammocks, and the soft music of the wind. “ Surely there can’t be any grown-up snowdrops at Christmas—it’s too early ! —and I shall be losing my way for weeks ! ” continued Rosella. Nevertheless, she kept on turning to the right through upward passages first of rock, then of sand, in which were embedded deep growing roots, then of soil with its minerals, broken up leaves, and corpses of insects which she didn’t like at all ; then through a passage lined with true red soil, where little grubs were lying fast asleep in their nests.

“ You ugly grubby little things ! ” remarked Rosella as she passed them.

“ They are only lying low at present. They will be lovely Painted Ladies and visit the court of Fairy Spring,” replied Love of Goodwill, hovering again at her side. “ And look ! There are the baby snowdrops asleep in their earthy cots. They, too, will awake soon and get up. I helped their mother to

ROSELLA

get up as she was in such a hurry to see the world. I'm afraid she will have got nipped by King Frost for her impatience. Farewell—I must go and see what is happening."

Rosella followed the sunbeam—into which the Sprite had vanished—and at once felt the keen air blowing on her face, and knew she was above ground once more. Everything was all white again. She sat down upon a piece of rock to rest, and noticed the sunbeam pointing straight at a little woe-begone snowdrop sticking up out of the snow before her. And to her joy the Snow Man was close by calling "**Rosella ! Rosella !**" in the echo's anxious tone she had heard before—so he must have wanted her then, badly.

"Yes, your Majesty !" she murmured.

He bent over her kindly. "There, little lady," he continued, "drink some of this now !" and something cold yet stinging was poured gently down her throat.

"Thank you, your Majesty. I did feel tired and queer, but your snow broth has made me all right." She said it quite gratefully. Then her eyes opened wide and she cried in amazement—

"Grandfather ! Why it's *you* ! You were the Snow Man all the time ! And look ! there's my muff up there that I left in the wall !"

"But for that sticking up we might never have

THE RAINBOW BOOK

found our little treasure," replied old Mr. Silverton. He picked her up and, holding her aloft, showed her to her anxious mother, who came hurrying on the scene.

"Don't shiver so, dearie," exclaimed Mrs. Silverton, passionately embracing the child, as hot tears dropped on her daughter's face. "You must be perished with cold, but this nice sunshine which has come out now will do you good."

"I didn't feel cold. It was quite nice and warm under the snow as you said, Mother—and so wonderful!"

Davis carried her home in triumph at the head of the procession; and after precautionary remedies had been taken, Rosella sat cosily tucked up in the big arm-chair in front of the huge log fire, thinking over all she had seen. Of course she confessed to her temptation to go astray, and was readily forgiven. Then, as Mr. Silverton insisted he had never in his life been any one else but himself, Rosella gaily recounted her meeting with the Snow Man at his Snow Castle. "And King Frost said, Grandfather," concluded Rosella, "that the credit of the Castle was his for providing the snow and not yours."

"Bless my soul!" cried old Mr. Silverton. "And he was right there, because I've had nothing to do with any Snow Castle or any Snow Man—there was some talk, but nothing came of it."

ROSELLA

“But I was King Frost’s visitor there, don’t you see,” insisted Rosella, smiling. “So I know that’s only one of your jokes, Grandfather.”

He smiled too and wiped his spectacles.

The next morning Rosella volunteered to fetch her grandfather and introduce him to King Frost. So the two climbed the hill. But no vestige of Snow Castle or Snow Man was there.

“There, you see!” said her grandfather, laughing, as he genially patted her on the cheek. How cold his hand felt! It nipped her with cold, so that she shivered. Yet the weather had changed, and it was more like a sunny day in spring than in midwinter.

She left old Mr. Silverton at his gate, and he assured her with a kiss that he wasn’t a bit disappointed at the wonderful disappearance, but that it was all certainly a very remarkable affair indeed.

Rosella thought so too. Then she turned and walked thoughtfully home.

THE CUCKOO THAT LIVED IN THE CLOCK-HOUSE

IT was rather a ramshackle, badly-built wooden house, in which the Cuckoo lived. Outside it looked smart enough, but inside, repairs were badly needed. It had been handed down from father to son, and over the front door, which was at the top of the house, stood a beautifully carved statue of their ancestor, Sir Cuckoo de Cuckoo.

The Clock-House was situated not far from the Dolls' House, backed by a flowery wall in a small department of Nursery Land ruled over by Robert and Lucy. Lucy was ground landlady of the Clock-House, and it was her daily privilege to wind up its affairs.

No one ever knocked at the Cuckoo's front door, because it had no number; there was a round dozen of numbers in the immediate neighbourhood. The pendulum, whose tongue never ceased to wag once it was wound up, remarked, that two firm hands were required to keep things in order. As to the chains, they regularly got weighed down

THE CUCKOO IN THE CLOCK-HOUSE

under the strain of responsibility, and a heavy weight it was.

So, as one could not summon the Cuckoo at will, the only thing to do was to wait and see it when it chose to appear, and then—as likely as not, if nobody was about—Robert would seize the opportunity to take pot-shots at it with his pea-shooter. So far he had invariably missed. Sometimes it kept an appointment with him punctually at the hour, sometimes it didn't. Occasionally, it came out at odd times, and then remained indoors altogether. When that happened for a more than usually long period, it was sure to be because the poor Cuckoo felt indisposed in its bellows; and when it became apparent that something had gone wrong with the inmate of the Clock-House, an entrance had to be effected by the back door and a dose of oil administered. Whereupon the front door would fly open and the Cuckoo appear again on the threshold—it never ventured further—bow to the multitude, or to empty space, and pipe “Cue—koo!” just as many times as it felt inclined at the moment.

One fine afternoon in spring, when the Cuckoo came out punctually, and went through its performance of three bows with a Cuckoo call after each salutation, there happened to be a fresh inmate all alone in the nursery. This was

THE RAINBOW BOOK

Tabiatha, the new kitten, cosily reposing in her new basket under the table. “Aha! Poultry!” mewed Tabiatha, lying low, opening a lazy but watchful eye, and gazing upwards. “Bless my tail! You’re a tender morsel, I’ll be bound—small, but a tit-bit!” So thought the kitten, with an increasing feeling of longing in the chest. It had sounded to Tabiatha like an echo of the call she had heard so recently in the lane near the old farm at home.

“I don’t want to pop out any more!” said the Cuckoo after re-entering the Clock-House. “I’m bored to tears!” And it settled down in a corner and looked very melancholy. “What with that horrid boy, Robert, lurking about—and now a kitten of all things! Why, life’s not worth the living! If ever I do pop out again, I should like to pop out for good and all—stretch my wings and fly away, right away, and see something of the world!”

“Work! That’s the cure for all woes!” solemnly ticked the pendulum. “Look at me, I’m always at it, with a good swinging stride.” The hands didn’t explain their views—they were keeping far apart, and were not on speaking terms. “Every one is expected to do his duty,” urged the pendulum.

“That was only meant for one day—not morn-

THE CUCKOO IN THE CLOCK-HOUSE

ing, noon, and night," argued the Cuckoo. "It's all very well for a wagtail like you—but for a Cuckoo with a soul above it—especially with a fine, well-trained voice!"

"Every one must do his duty at all times. Yes, look at me—but I fear you can't see me. Do you follow me?" asked the pendulum jokingly. Getting no reply, it ticked-tacked on, until the Cuckoo felt quite distracted.

"Listen to me, children," said their mother, entering the nursery, when playtime had begun; "Nurse has gone to lie down. She isn't very well this afternoon. So at four o'clock put everything away neatly; then make yourselves tidy, and come downstairs, where you may have tea with me."

Robert and Lucy said they were sorry for Nurse, but they smiled, and hopped about with delight at the treat of tea downstairs. They promised to do as they were told, and with muffled footsteps hurried on the landing to open the gate and let their mother out of their domain, and quietly closed it to keep themselves in. Then they settled down in the nursery to "Loto;" but as Lucy always won, Robert tired of it. Card houses didn't answer either, because it amused Robert not to build them, but to shake the table when Lucy's structures were in course of erection.

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Their mother, busily writing in the drawing-room, began to wonder why the children didn't come downstairs ; and tea was just being brought in, when suddenly screams and cries were heard issuing from the nursery, and she rushed upstairs in alarm.

There she found the nursery littered with things, chairs in unusual places, some overturned, and Lucy lying on the floor crying, with a cut on her lip, which was bleeding. Robert had both stockings torn, and was ruefully rubbing his knees. The little girl was more frightened than hurt.

“ Whatever has happened, Robert ? ” exclaimed their mother as she helped Lucy to her feet, and comforted her.

“ I was hunting,” he began to explain, “ and she was the gazelle, and I was chasing her from rock to rock——”

“ Jumping from the table on to the chairs and back again,” added Lucy in further explanation, “ and we both tumbled down ! ”

“ Serve you both right for being so disobedient as to jump on the furniture,” replied their mother, with placid satisfaction that matters were no worse. “ You ought to have been all tidied up, and downstairs by now.”

“ It isn’t time yet, surely, Mother ! ” The three turned instinctively towards the Cuckoo clock. It had stopped at three minutes to four.

THE CUCKOO IN THE CLOCK-HOUSE

“There now, Lucy, you silly !” cried her brother ; “if you hadn’t forgotten to wind it up, we shouldn’t have had that beastly tumble, and shouldn’t have been late for tea.”

“Come, dears, quickly, and I’ll help make you ready,” said their mother ; and they left the nursery together.

During the excitement Tabitha had remained unnoticed in her basket under the table, glad in all the turmoil to be peaceful and forgotten. She came out, stretched herself lazily, and soon began to gambol about the room. The clock chain, lying loosely on the ground, attracted her attention. She crouched, then leapt at one bound upon it, backed a little, touched it with her paw, lay on her side, and played with the bright links with all four paws and much enjoyment. With a sudden movement she righted herself — made a spring upwards, missed the chain and fell without hurt. Liking this novel game, she leapt higher next time, and alighted on a cushioned chair, scratched her way up, jumped on to a bookcase, and then on to an empty shelf. There was the chain within easy reach. Putting out her paw, it caught instead in a ring she hadn’t noticed. To disentangle it she reached over, lost her foothold, and, still caught in the ring, found that the rattling chain was moving

THE RAINBOW BOOK

downwards with her weight until it deposited her gently on the ground, greatly to her surprise. Again she scrambled up the furniture in the same way. Her paw was now on both chains. Suddenly something swung backwards and forwards—

Tic—tac !

Tabiatha was for the moment dismayed, and, arching her back, she stood rooted to the spot.

Tic—tac !

It came unpleasantly close to her, nearly touching her nose each time, but she never budged an inch.

Whr-r-r-r-r !

Cuc—koo ! Cuc—koo ! Cuc—koo ! Cuc—

Tabiatha, rising to the occasion, and quick to seize an opportunity or anything else, took her last and only chance. She seized the poultry with both paws—Crack ! Snap ! She lost her balance and fell down, down, on to the cushioned chair. The Cuckoo flew into the air, alighted on Tabiatha's back, and bounded on to the ground. Tabiatha forgot at once her escape from breaking her neck, sprang after the Cuckoo lying there, turned it over, paused, sniffed, found to her surprise that it was not good to eat, that it hadn't even feathers, and was only made of wood, turned it over again, and began tapping it and pouncing on it until, suddenly forgetting all about it, she cantered away sideways with her tail curling in the air. She jumped into

THE CUCKOO IN THE CLOCK-HOUSE

her basket, rolled herself up, soon purred herself fast asleep, and looked the very picture of helpless innocence.

The Cuckoo, out in the world at last, having recovered from its first alarm at the useless stiffness of its wings, waited for something to happen. As nothing did happen, it thought the world a very dull and stupid place, and concluded that, after all, work was better than lying there helpless, idle, motionless, and ridiculous. What was the use of its trained voice now? It couldn't articulate a sound even to summon help. It had no idea of the time, but the sun was shining brightly when at last it found itself carefully lifted and placed on a higher level.

When Lucy entered the nursery that morning, soon after Robert, he exclaimed—

“I say, Lucy! There’s something fresh for breakfast. Look on your plate!”

“Oh, my poor Cuckoo!” she cried in distress. “You’ve shot it at last. You bad boy—I shan’t love you ever any more!”

But she did love him at once again, for it was a fact that no one knew how ever the Cuckoo came to be lying on the floor in the remote corner where Nurse had picked it up. The cushioned chair was in its place again—a long way off the clock. Every one was mystified, and could not imagine how it had

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happened. But Tabitha knew all about it, though you would never have guessed it from her round, innocent eyes as she sat licking first one velvety paw, and then the other velvety paw, as though she were washing them of any share in the mischief.

When the Clock-House was spring-cleaned, and the Cuckoo duly set there on its legs again, it formed the firm determination to remain at its post in the future, and, with its Clock-House in order, it worked ever after with regularity and good humour just like one o'clock.

“Cuc—koo!” Bow, click.

CHRISTMAS AT THE COURT OF KING JORUM

THE great evening had come, and every one in Cosmopolis Castle was agog with excitement. Eight months before, the Monarch had by Royal Herald Extraordinary announced his intention of making known his decision on Christmas Eve. And Christmas Eve had come. No wonder every one was agog with excitement, because King Jorum was at last going to announce which of the lovely ladies of the Court should be raised to the position of the late Queen, his defunct consort. She, poor soul, had possessed neither charm nor beauty, and without her he had been quite happy for the past two years, surrounded by smiling faces and kept constantly amused by the ladies and gentlemen of his Court.

He had a jovial nature, and was an indulgent father to his two young daughters, especially fond of the younger, Princess Veronica, for more delightful sweetness, prettiness, and loveliness it would be difficult to find in any other young damsel of sixteen years old. So believed that fine

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young soldier, Prince Olivin; and so believed every one else in the whole kingdom. Every one else, with one exception—Princess Christobel, her sister, older by one year. She had her own ideas on the subject evidently, for she kept a surly silence when her sister's praises were sung. People said it was her jealousy, because she was plain-looking, and sulky in expression and character; and some did say she was secretly in love with Prince Olivin herself.

Outside the castle this night the silent landscape had been decorated, by order of King Frost, in snow and crystal. Inside the castle the great halls had been decorated, by order of King Jorum, in holly and mistletoe. In the antechamber to the ball-room stood the giant Christmas-tree, hung with so many gifts of exquisite needlework from the ladies of the Court for the King, and so many, too, for Princess Veronica, that there was hardly room for any other presents for any one else, so they had to be stacked up in separate heaps on the floor.

There was one present on the tree, which was handsomer and costlier than all the rest—it was a pair of woollen boots so cunningly and dexterously wrought with precious jewels that they were the most beautiful ever seen or heard of. They were the handiwork of Countess Spinx, and of all the handsome ladies who were assembled in the ball-

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room where the candles in the chandeliers cast a softening light on their charms, she seemed this Christmas Eve the most unnerved, the most excited. Courtiers came strolling in by twos and threes, and the scene became animated and gay.

For as history shows, it was the custom at the Court of King Jorum, by special decree of the Monarch, that every man, woman, and child should dress themselves in costumes of any distinctive style they liked—whatever suited their fancy best. (That was the origin, ages after, of the term—fancy-dress.) There was thus no slavish following of fashion, and consequently every one looked, or fancied they looked, their very, very best, and were thoroughly at ease in their quaint and, mostly, fascinating attire.

“Here’s Little Love!” exclaimed a bevy of fair dames, pressing forward as a handsome child stepped into their midst, dressed as Cupid, and looking the realest of little Loves from the tips of his tiny bare toes to the tips of his tiny bare wings. He was the King’s godson and pet.

“He’s sure to know! Perhaps he can give us a hint of the news!” exclaimed Countess Spinx with eyes blazing eagerly as she placed herself in his path, with her crook firmly planted on the ground: she was dressed as a shepherdess, which showed to advantage the curls on her fair neck, and her small

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feet in their high-heeled shoes. “Whisper to me!” she coaxed; “or,” with a pretty shake of the crook, “I’ll not let you pass!”

Little Love might have been deaf, looking neither to the right nor to the left, so unconcernedly did he continue his way stolidly on to meet the procession of the King.

Countess Spinx bit her lip in vexation; the other ladies merely shrugged their shoulders and laughed; and the gentlemen stroked their mouths to hide their smiles. Then all conversation was smothered by the entry of the heralds with their raised silver trumpets and their—

Par—parraparpar—pip—ha!

Par—parraparpar—paar—r!

This was immediately followed by the entry of King Jorum holding Little Love by the hand. The whole company bowed and curtsied very low—and then stood at attention, breathless with expectation.

King Jorum was a very big man, with a very big smile, and very big woollen boots. He always wore woollen boots because, being his own Commander-in-chief, he liked to stand at ease. So he said, naturally in a very big voice—

“According to my promise it is now my pleasure to announce to my Court here assembled my decision with regard to your future Queen. After



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prolonged thought and study of face and character I have come to the conclusion that there is not one lady of my Court but who is quite lovely enough and charming enough to become my royal consort. Therefore to choose is difficult—so difficult that it is impossible, and, being impossible, I shall never wed again. I have spoken."

For a moment there was intense silence. Then deafening cheers arose, and all faces were radiant with delight, especially the faces of the ladies, who thus remained equals, no jealousy being possible. "Such tact!" said one. "How true!" cried another. But one lady had slipped away unobserved. It was Countess Spinx.

The gallant Monarch, unaccompanied, pleased at the reception given to his declaration, smilingly passed on to the antechamber, as was his wont, for a private view of the Christmas-tree before the revels commenced. King Jorum had detached one of the woollen boots embroidered with pearls and precious stones, anxiously tried it on, and was admiring the effect, when Little Love appeared and inquired if he would grant an interview to Prince Olivin, who was waiting without.

"I am engaged," was his Majesty's impatient reply.

"That, Sire, is what Prince Olivin wants to be!"

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“Eh, what’s that? Put on this other boot for me”—he unfastened it from the tree. “Ha! that’s very smart. Very attentive of the dear Countess. Now show him in!”

The two young Princesses had not made their appearance for the proclamation. They, as well as Little Love, had been in the King’s confidence, and they did not intend to be present. However, as the hour of the revels was fast approaching, Veronica feared that her sister would be late as usual, so she took her last glance at herself in the mirror, tightened the blue ribbon that was threaded through her fair hair, tucked a pale rose in the blue sash of her high-waisted, white muslin frock, and flitted off happily to Christobel’s room.

“Come in!” said a not very amiable voice in response to the light tap. “Oh, it’s you, is it?”

“Can I help you, as you have no maid?”

Princess Christobel’s room was by no means tidy. “I don’t want any help,” she replied ungraciously, moving some of the garments that littered the bed, “but you can sit down there, if you like, next to the ‘Shah of Persia.’”

Veronica took the place indicated next to the sweetest little blue Persian kitten that was curled up fast asleep on the coverlet.

“I like your new frock, Veronica,” continued

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Christobel, surveying her sister as she pinned up her black hair without troubling even to do it before a glass ; “ but you look pretty in anything. If you didn’t, no one would trouble to pet you. No one ever fusses over me.”

“ Papa does, for one.”

“ Only because he thinks it’s his duty.”

“ I would if you’d let me.”

“ Oh yes. You’d be very pleased if I’d let you hang about me—an ugly girl can’t show to much advantage next to a pretty one. I know your little game.”

“ Oh, Christobel ! How can you say such unkind, unjust things ? ” protested poor Veronica with a sob.

“ If you want to cry,” said Christobel crossly, “ you shouldn’t do so until you go to sleep. You cry so easily ; and then your bright eyes look heavy, and your aquiline nose gets red, and the whole Castle gets upset about them. Who cares if *my* eyes are red ? ”

“ Every one, of course. Besides, one’s looks aren’t everything.”

“ I know differently. Looks *are* everything. But I don’t care if people trouble about me or not, or anything they do, or think, or say ! ”

“ What *are* you putting on, Christobel ? Not *that*, surely ! ”

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“Yes. Same old Red Riding Hood cape and green skirt—does for indoors or out. Same old crew about, I suppose ?”

“I suppose so. But it’s Christmas Eve. Those loose things don’t even suit you. Let me lend you a new frock which I have, just the same as this ; we can arrange ribbons of your colour, red. We’re the same height, and it will suit you quite as well as it suits me.”

“A nice comparison people would draw, eh ?” sneered Christobel ; and being ready she took the sleepy Shah in her arms and stalked downstairs with him faintly mewing his protests, leaving her sister to follow if she liked.

In the ball-room Christobel superciliously took no notice of the respectful greetings of the Court. She was naturally shy, reserved too, and sensitive as to her appearance and lack of charm. But Veronica had a kind word for every one, stopping to greet with a smile or a merry jest all present ; for they all adored her for her sweetness, graciousness, and extraordinary beauty. There wasn’t a man but who would have died for her, nor a woman but who felt better for her radiant presence. Little Love suddenly appeared and whispered something to Princess Veronica, who blushed, was confused, and said in a low voice to her sister—

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“Prince Olivin is here! Papa has sent for me.”

“You might have told me he was coming,” replied Christobel, turning pale.

“But I never knew, indeed.” Her sister had turned away, and Little Love was leading Veronica towards the antechamber.

It seemed to Princess Christobel as though every face in the ball-room was a mask, and behind that mask were eyes that gleamed with mockery—that she had only to turn her back, and fingers of scorn and derision would mark her passage—and she turned and fled, never pausing in her course through the long passages and up the marble stairway until she was back in her room, where she flung the poor Shah and herself on the bed and burst into a torrent of tears and lamentations in her loneliness, disappointment, and jealousy. The kitten, too, looked unusually blue, and mewed disconsolately—felt bored, then purred, stretched its little self on the coverlet, and fell asleep again. Before long the sound of the heralds’ silver trumpets pierced right up into Christobel’s ears—

Par—parraparpar—pip—ha!

Par—parraparpar—paar—r!

And she knew that the engagement was then being announced of Princess Veronica to Prince

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Olivin; and the strains of the Waltz of the Affianced which followed, played by the Court musicians, confirmed the fact.

How long she remained thus in the dark she did not know. Sounds of an angry voice roused her from her stupor, and she went out into the brilliantly lighted corridor, shading her eyes from the glare, the scent of flowers and the soft strains of music becoming more noticeable as she approached the stairway whence the voices proceeded—one of which she could now distinguish as being that of her sister. She peeped over the banisters, and saw, standing close beside Veronica, Countess Spinx, white with suppressed passion.

“ You knew,” hissed the Countess, “ that there was to be no Queen.”

“ I and my sister knew. Yes. Let me pass; I don’t know what’s become of her. I want to fetch her.”

“ You might have told it to your old friend. You are looking radiantly beautiful to-night.”

“ I am very happy.”

“ Happy with your betrothed ?”

“ Yes.”

“ Listen ! Did you know that every one said *I* had the best chance of being Queen ?”

“ You !” exclaimed the young Princess in astonishment. “ Fancy young you my stepmother !”

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and she burst out into a merry laugh. The next moment she was falling headlong down the marble stairway, and then lay quite still, bruised and bleeding. In the stillness that ensued—for the music had stopped—Countess Spinx flew upstairs, where she was confronted by Princess Christobel, who pushed roughly past her and hurried down to her sister's side. Her screams for help brought people running from every side. The injured girl, still unconscious, was quickly borne to her apartments, and the Court physicians surrounded her.

All sorts of rumours were set afloat in the Castle, but all that was gathered for certain by the company, as they dispersed, was that Princess Veronica slipped on the marble stair owing to her new high-heeled shoes—that the sweet face was strapped and bandaged, for it was all cut and bruised, that the nose was broken, and her beauty spoilt for ever. Prince Olivin was half wild with grief, and poor King Jorum was shedding tears all alone in his study when Christobel sought admittance. Her face was set and stern, and the sight of his weakness didn't unnerve her as she said bluntly—

“Father, Veronica did not slip on the stair—she was purposely and viciously thrown down.”

“Eh, *what?*” exclaimed the King, staring at her. “Are you taking leave of your senses? There's

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not a soul who would hurt my pretty darling. You have enemies. She has none."

"*She* was happy. Others were not. Countess Spinx was in a fury of disappointment at not being chosen Queen. She flung poor Veronica down in spite and malice. I saw her do it."

The King bounded up. "Summon the Countess!" he cried.

Before her Christobel repeated her accusation, and Countess Spinx tried to assert she only put out her arms to save the unfortunate Princess from slipping. Further questioned, she got confused, contradicted herself, and finally sunk on her knees and prayed for mercy.

"To the cells!" shouted the King, and his eyes falling on his jewelled boots, he hastily tore them off and threw them after her as she was carried away.

When, next day, poor little Princess Veronica recovered consciousness and was free from pain she asked for her sister, who came quickly to her side.

"Have you heard," asked Veronica faintly, "that I—I—I am maimed for life? With a broken nose and scarred face I shall not only be ugly but repulsive."

"Poor Veronica! You will then be on the same level with me in the future. How you will miss all the petting, all the love!"

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“ I suppose my life is spoilt. And when I had beauty, I thought of it and prized it so little. But won’t you love me, Christobel ? ”

“ Yes, I will now.”

“ Why only now ? ”

“ Because I shall always feel sorry for you—I have never felt sorry for any one but myself before—and I shall love you heaps and heaps.”

“ Don’t you think others may feel sorry for me, too ? —Poor Prince Olivin ! Poor me ! ” she added with a little moan.

Christobel shook her head sadly. “ Beauty is everything ! You will understand that now.”

No limbs were broken, and in a couple of days Princess Veronica, with her head and face veiled in white lace, was able to receive some visits of sympathy in her misfortune.

King Jorum was inconsolable, and whenever he came out of the invalid’s room he would vow terrible threats of vengeance on Countess Spinx, who was trembling for her spiteful life in the cells.

On the third night after the Christmas festivities had been brought to their sudden and tragic close, Princess Christobel dreamed such a vivid dream that it awakened her. She dreamed that Little Love, who avoided her whenever he could, came smilingly up to her, kissed her hand, and raising a letter he held, showed, with a look of triumph which

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puzzled her, that it was addressed to her sister. She awoke, and instantly remembered that Little Love had really kissed her hand that evening, to her great surprise. She sat up in bed listening, for she fancied she heard her sister call. Becoming anxious for her comfort, she rose, and went gently in to her. It was quiet in the dimly lighted chamber. The invalid lay softly sleeping, her face all bandaged, and her glorious hair a mass of gold about the pillow. Under her hand was an open letter. Tempted by the influence of her dream, Christobel drew nearer. It was Prince Olivin's firm writing—there were only a few lines, and the moonlight shone full upon them. She could not help reading :—

“ Beloved ! Think not to release me. It is your sweet nature I love. You. Your beautiful mind. Nothing could ever change them !

OLIVIN.”

Was it joy for her sister ? was it some gleam of an unknown sense of peace, tenderness, and hope in her soul, that brought scalding tears to Christobel's eyes as, half blinded by them, she groped her way back to her room, where she fell on her knees and cried softly, and prayed that, now through her tears her eyes had been opened, she might learn to become different ? “ Beauty is *not* everything, then ! ” she repeated wonderingly to

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herself over and over again, finding each time fresh comfort in the thought. "How wrong I have been! Out of her disfigurement Veronica says my love for her has grown, and is worth much to her in comfort. It has brought us close together, and made us both happy. How grateful she is for every one's attention! And now the Prince still pleads for her! So! it was not her beauty that attracted him—it was not her beauty—not her beauty!" Thus she thought earnestly and long, and it brought her a strange sense of faith in herself and others. "I shall tell them all that I, too, know how truly she deserves her happiness!"

And tell them she did, and they opened their eyes and bowed respectfully, and thought more of Princess Christobel than they had ever thought before.

New Year's Eve came round with its accustomed regularity, and the inmates of Cosmopolis Castle were looking unusually grave for the occasion. Princess Veronica was to appear once more in their midst, and with the bandages removed from her poor face. It was a silent, uneasy company that had gathered together in the great ball-room, and King Jorum, engaged in a game of "Snap" with Little Love in a corner, looked ill and worn from anxiety for his favourite child.

Suddenly the card-players rose, and a thrill of

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excitement went through the assembly—Princess Veronica stood on the threshold in white muslin and blue. Her face showed no trace of scars ; but her nose ! Her nose was unrecognisable. It was no more aquiline, but tip-tilted—the sweetest little turned-up feature imaginable, and her appearance had actually *gained* : Princess Veronica had become the loveliest lady in the land !

After being locked in her father's arms Veronica found herself suddenly in those of her lover. King Jorum was frantic with delight. He called for Doctor Quick and made him Lord High Druggist of his Majesty's dominions, with all the appanages, endowments, privileges, and perquisites appertaining to the office. He showered honours on every physician on or near the premises. He talked of bonfires, and of honours, and tiaras all round, until he was hoarse. Then Princess Christobel appeared in white muslin and red ribbons, and there were cheers for her animated appearance and her kind expression as she gracefully returned their greeting. “Father,” she said, drawing him on one side, “Veronica is asking for Countess Spinx. May I—may I tell the prisoner that now all is well she is forgiven ?” King Jorum shook his head vigorously, although he was too happy to do anything but smile all the time. “She has been in the cells for ever so long,” pleaded Christobel, and

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her father was so taken aback at the revelation of her fine eyes and sweet voice, which had never at any time struck him before, that he nodded his head violently.

That evening a stranger was bidden to the feast—no less a person than the great traveller, brother to Prince Olivin, just returned from a voyage of discovery—the bronzed and manly young Duke of Rosenleaf. “Who is that charming young girl?” he asked, as soon as he set eyes on her.

“Princess Christobel, your Highness,” replied Little Love with a sly smile.

King Jorum couldn’t get to sleep that night. He usually slept too much, and was in the habit of unscrewing the top of his foot-warmer and pouring therefrom the hot coffee which he imbibed at intervals in order not to oversleep himself in the morning and thus set a bad example in the land. But he had no need for it to-night. He could not get to sleep at all.

He thought, and thought, and thought what had wrought such a marvellous and rapid change in the character and appearance of his elder daughter. He smiled over it, too, and smiled until his cheeks ached with so much smiling, as much as his poor head ached with so much thought. Still he went on thinking right through the night, and just as he

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put up his arms above his head to break into a mighty yawn, he suddenly cried—

“I have it! That’s it! She has realised the old theme of Peace and Goodwill, as is proper at this time of year, and has turned over a new leaf! Bravo!” And he turned himself over, snored, and overslept himself.

So the first day of the New Year opened in complete harmony at the Court of King Jorum. And when the Duke of Rosenleaf asked Princess Christobel if she would make the Happy New Year a happy one for him, she smiled and blushingly allowed him to place the prettiest of diamond rings on her finger.

And the New Year was still in its youth when the two young Princesses were married. And by the time that the Shah of Persia’s great-great-grand-kittens were gambolling about the palace, it had become a frequent and pleasant subject for argument and debate throughout the kingdom—“Who is the most charming and lovable woman in the land, Christobel or Veronica?”

ONE APRIL DAY

PART I

A QUEER GODMOTHER

IT was the First of April. The weather could not make up its mind whether to be tearful or gay. So, after changing three times, and deciding at last that it was not grown-up to cry, the sun dried up the tear-drops and beamed down on everything and everybody.

“Isn’t it a shame, Wilfrid, to have to prepare lessons when it’s such a fine afternoon ?” exclaimed Norah. She rose from the study table and looked longingly out of the French window to where the crocuses on the lawn seemed to be having the best of it.

“Don’t be lazy,” replied her brother. “Just come and help me with this sum when I tell you.”

“I’m not going to do as you tell me. If you were grown up—say fifteen—it would be different ; but you’re only a year older than me—not even nine yet—and yet you——”

“Halloo!” interrupted Wilfrid with a low whistle,

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as he strolled towards the window. "Look at that's legs."

"Which's?" inquired Norah, gazing in the direction he pointed.

"Them's."

"What's?" she asked eagerly, looking around.

"None! Well, you *are* an April fool!" exclaimed Wilfrid with scornful glee as he resumed his seat; "that's the second time to-day!"

"And you're a very rude boy, and you're not allowed to call me horrid names like that," said Norah with dignity; "and I won't be teased always."

With a very offended look, she set to work on her copy-book.

"Lend me your paint-box when we've finished our lessons, will you, Norah dear?" said Wilfrid, after a short pause.

"I can't," she replied, without looking up.

"Why?"

"I don't know why, but I can't."

"Cat in the manger! You've got nothing you want to paint, as I have."

There was a longer pause, during which they both scribbled away, and scratched, and spluttered, whilst their tongues moved silently from side to side outside their parted lips, left to right, following the direction of each new line.

Then Norah heaved a sigh and remarked—

ONE APRIL DAY

“Wilfrid, isn’t Cinderella lovely?”

“Yes, as girls go.”

“Oh, how I wish we lived in those times, when there were fairy godmothers and things!” exclaimed Norah rapturously; then she added with a sigh—

“Aunt Leonora is my godmother, but she never gives me anything, and the godmothers in the fairy stories always give heaps of things.”

“You can’t expect great fat podges like that to be like fairy godmothers, you silly!”

“But she ought to like giving things. How nice it is to give presents and be thanked!”

“Yes; it’s nice to give presents—when they are cheap. Perhaps,” continued her brother in a wise voice,—“perhaps Aunt Leonora can’t afford it if she isn’t rich!”

“Cinderella’s godmother never seemed to consider the price of anything. I wish—oh, how I wish——”

“Oh, how I wish you’d be quiet and help me with this sum. You remember your tables better than I do, but you needn’t be jolly cocky about it all the same.”

Norah wasn’t listening to him. Her mind was far away from lessons. She was thinking, if she had her choice, what she would like to be, what she would like to do, and eat, and, above all, what she

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would like to wear. “ If only I had a fairy godmother, I——”

“ Rubbish ! ” exclaimed Wilfrid, growing cross, and frowning as he watched her moving restlessly about the room.

“ I—of course, I wouldn’t refuse her anything. Fairy godmothers generally appear at first disguised as old women, and ask for something, such as a drink of water, or beg you to carry a load of wood or whatever they happen to have in hand. So I should be ready to do anything and give anything, and earn my big reward.”

“ Oh, shurrup ! ” growled her brother. “ Much better lend me your paint-box.”

But she didn’t hear him ; taken up with her fancies she continued excitedly—

“ I know what I’ll do. I’ll try and tempt her to come. Perhaps I may even have a fairy godmother without knowing it ! ”

And she began to dance about, singing—

“ Tra-la-la, fairy godmother,
Come to me now, I pray ;
Visit a little girl who is longing for you
And will do anything you want.
Tra-la-la, fairy godmother, come.”

It wasn’t very good poetry, but Norah hadn’t time to polish it up.

ONE APRIL DAY

“Oh, I say ! How can I do my lessons with all this going on ?” exclaimed Wilfrid. And flinging his things together he bounced out of the room and banged the door behind him.

Norah wasn’t sorry he was gone, and danced once more all round the room singing ; then knelt down, and, stretching out her arms towards the crocuses which were so stiff and upright in their indifference, she said plaintively—

“Come, dear fairy godmother, I want you !”

And lo ! between Norah and the window there suddenly appeared a little old woman in a long cloak, whose features were hidden by the large hood she wore.

“Oh !” exclaimed Norah, almost breathless in her astonishment and delight.

“I have come,” said the stranger in cracked, quavering tones.

“I’m so glad to see you,” replied Norah politely, too excited to feel shy.

“I—your fairy godmother—am here to test you and see if you are really worthy. See this slate which I have brought under my cloak. Every little lady should be able to do arithmetic right. Can you do this sum ?”

“How funny, godmother dear !” said Norah, looking at it. “We are just learning these. It’s a difficult one, but I’ll try.”

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In a few moments she had done the sum and proved it correct.

“Very good,” said the fairy, with a grunt of satisfaction.

“Will you take a drink of water?” now asked the hospitable Norah eagerly. “Do.”

“No, thank you. But I may take something else. Tell me, what of all your treasures do you like most?”

“Oh, my paint-box!”

“I knew it; I am glad you tell the truth.”

“How did you know it?” asked Norah in surprise.

“I am your fairy godmother. I’ll take that paint-box, please.”

Norah brought it and gave it to her with the greatest pleasure, and pressingly inquired if she might carry anything anywhere. But that was not required. Then she stood waiting expectantly. And her heart seemed to turn a somersault of delight when her fairy godmother spoke the following words:—

“I am satisfied. Now you may wish for whatever you like. But you must make up your mind before I count three.”

Norah’s eyes had followed her glance at the clock, which pointed to one minute to three; but her mind, from the flutter of excitement she was in, became a complete blank.

ONE APRIL DAY

“One!” said the fairy solemnly.

This brought the little goddaughter to her senses, and she began to mutter confusedly—

“Shall I wish for a gold carriage, like Cinderella’s, or a pet lamb, with a blue ribbon and a bell round its neck, or a frock embroidered in diamonds, or——”

“Two!” said the fairy.

“No,” murmured Norah hurriedly. “If I were a queen, I could order those things and everything else. I wish”—the clock struck three—“I were a——”

“Three!” called out the fairy.

“——a Queen!” screamed Norah, just the second after.

“Too late!” said the fairy. “Farewell!” And she moved towards the door.

Norah’s eyes filled with tears. “Please come back!” she pleaded.

“I can’t.”

“Oh, why can’t you?”

“I don’t know why, but I can’t,” replied the little old woman.

This sounded strangely in Norah’s ears, and what sounded stranger still were the next words she heard uttered; these were simply—

“Thanks, awfully!”

Then Norah exclaimed at once, “That’s Wilfrid’s voice!” She pushed aside the hood. “Why, you’re Wilfrid!” she cried, amazed.

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“ And you’re April Billy ! ” he shouted with glee, throwing off the long cloak. “ You said you’d do anything and give anything for a reward, and now you’ve had to do so without one ! ” And, bursting out laughing, he ran off with the sum and the paint-box.

Norah sat down on a footstool and burst out crying. She was angry and disappointed, and she sobbed bitterly as she thought how she had been tricked into doing Wilfrid’s horrid sum, how she had been made to give away her treasured paint-box which he had envied for months, and, worst of all a thousand times, how she had no fairy godmother after all !

PART II

THE LITTLE FLOWER GIRL

BUT Norah was a plucky little girl, and at times a wise little girl. And, moreover, she had a sort of feeling that it all served her right for being silly, and dissatisfied, and too selfish to lend her paint-box. Wilfrid certainly was a tease, but he was really a dear good brother, and always lent her his things, and did his best to champion her and get her out of a scrape.

Still, she felt she would like to pay him out, all the same—he’d had such a lovely time being fairy godmother !

ONE APRIL DAY

So she decided, like the weather, that it was not grown-up to cry, and she dried her eyes. Then all at once she smiled and laughed outright. For an idea had come to her, which she proceeded to carry out. She certainly began to do some rather queer things.

First of all she took off her shoes and stockings. Then she untied the pink ribbon which kept her hair tidy, so that her curls fell in a towsled mass about her flushed cheeks. Next she took off her pink overall pinafore, which she hid away; and gathering her white frock over her head, displayed a short red-and-white striped petticoat.

Running quickly about the room she took all the violets from the vases, strewed some of them in the fold of her frock, which she held together in one hand, and put together a large bunch of the flowers for her other hand.

Then she stepped through the open window, threw some sand upon her feet and ankles, and thus prepared, stood on the path outside, looked in, and waited.

Very soon Wilfrid burst into the room, exclaiming—

“Come and look at the healthy colour I’ve painted on your big doll’s pale cheeks. Oh, Norah!” he added, looking round the empty room.

And now he became conscious of a little flower-

THE RAINBOW BOOK

girl standing on the garden path, and piteously offering him a bunch of violets.

Norah had heard what he had said, and felt vexed that he had dared to touch her big doll; still, she had not the affection for that stately lady that she had for the small invalid doll with the broken leg, so she only said—

“Buy a bunch of violets, sir?”

He was a tender-hearted boy, and at once fetched down his money-box from a shelf in the cupboard, unlocked it, and took out twopence which he gave her; but then he felt awkward and refused the flowers.

An organ in the street started playing.

“I can dance to that if you can pay,” said the little girl thoughtfully, eyeing the money-box.

“How much do you want?” he asked.

“Three shillings,” she replied boldly.

“That’s all I’ve got.”

“That’ll do, then,” she said; “I want it so badly.”

“Yes, but——”

Not heeding his protests, she stole into the room and began to dance to the organ, as she had seen the poor children do in the streets, her little bare feet twirling up slowly and descending with measured steps on to the soft carpet.

ONE APRIL DAY

“Oh, I say!” soon exclaimed Wilfrid with dissatisfaction; “my sister Norah can dance better than that, for nothing!”

Nevertheless, he felt bound to empty his money-box into the hand she now held out.

Solemnly she made him a little bob of a curtsey. Then she began to caper about the room in a very different sort of spirit. And then, catching hold of the astonished boy round the neck, she kissed him.

“Hi! Shurrup!” cried Wilfrid, disengaging himself and looking sheepish.

“Oh, you April goose!” sang Norah; “April goose—you’re an April goose, Master Wilfrid!” And she uncovered her head and shook back her curls.

“Halloo!” exclaimed Wilfrid, ruefully at first, and then added more cheerily—

“Ha! Do you think I didn’t know you all the time?”

“Did you really?” inquired his sister, her eyes wide open with surprise.

“No, I didn’t,” he replied curtly.

Then Norah’s arm stole round her brother’s neck, and she put the money into his pocket, and told him gently that she had only wanted to have a little bit of fun, and he was welcome to use her paint-box —only please not on her dolls.

Then Wilfrid told her that she was a jolly good

THE RAINBOW BOOK

sort ; and that after all it was a shame to tease her, as she couldn't fight him for it. And Norah hugged him, and they both laughed about how well they had " pretended " to one another.

The sun was shining still, and when the children romped on the lawn the stuck-up crocuses didn't have the best of it, after all.

THE STORM THE TEAPOT BREWED

IN a bright nursery, hung with pictures, the table was laid for tea. Upon an iron tray, which had seen much service—even military service, as a drum used by the nursery band—stood the tea-set. This set included a very large cup which belonged to Nurse, bearing the funny inscription, “I am not greedy, but I like a lot.” The other cups were also lettered in gold. One hailed, it declared, “From Margate,” and showed the pier as a proof. Another, a small one made of porcelain, wished “Many Happy Returns to Effie” every time she looked at it. A thick, fat cup proclaimed itself “A Present to Daniel,” and a mug bore the perpetual reminder that it was “For a Good Boy”—but it was cracked, so it didn’t look quite happy, perhaps because the reminder was not always capable of keeping the boy good.

The Kettle completed the party, but sat comfortably on the warm hob next the fire, drowsily singing snatches of song, in the knowledge of having done his duty in giving the thirsty Teapot a drink of water. So all was ready for tea except the children. Nurse had gone to collect them, when

THE RAINBOW BOOK

the Chinese Teapot, who always liked to appear important, suddenly exclaimed—

“ What a noise that Kettle is making, to be sure ! One could scarcely hear one’s self rattle if one wanted to.”

The Kettle, ignoring the protest, sang on—

“ Just now we were quiet,
No noise and no riot,
You could hear a bread-plate drop—Flop !”

“ We used to have a very nice English teapot once,” remarked the Porcelain Cup.

“ I remember,” replied her neighbour from Margate. “ He came from Worcestershire. He was a big pot, and thought himself no end of a swell.”

“ What ! Kettle-time already !” exclaimed the Tongs, yawning and stretching his legs.

“ A nice sort of life it is for one of my grade and standing,” grumbled the Teapot, “ to be surrounded by such a set of ugly, foreign mugs and things as you all are !”

There was a general rattling of displeasure at the insult, but it was drowned by the Kettle, who could see a joke, singing up merrily—

“ If there’s a fuss—if a Pot should allude
As a ‘ mug ’ to a China Cup,
There’s always a clatter
Of jug, plate, and platter,
Till somebody washes them up.”

THE STORM THE TEAPOT BREWED

“It’s disgraceful to go on like this!” complained the Milk-jug, looking rather broken-down about the handle.

“Ah!” said the Teapot with a sneer, “when one only dates from 1887, and hasn’t a handle to one’s back, one should retire to the seclusion of the cupboard, and remain there as a curio.”

“There was once a Jubilee Jug-gins,
Jug-jug-juggins,”

hummed the Kettle.

“Poor old crock!” said the Sugar-basin sweetly, melting with pity through all her composition. For she was his inseparable companion, and knew that the Milk-jug was full of human kindness, and useful still.

“Never mind the quarrelling, darlings,” whispered the gentlemanly Spoons to their lady friends, whom they had taken in to tea, “we will protect you.”

“Upon my word!” exclaimed she from Margate, “I’m glad *I* was not born in China. Where I come from rudeness is unknown.”

The Kettle took up the idea and sang gaily—

“They’re pottery, porcelain, colour, and gold,
They come from the china shop,
Where crockery’s bought, and the customer’s sold,
And the Bull galloped in so angry and bold,
And when the poor, terrified shopkeeper told
Him to go, he did nothing but stop.”

THE RAINBOW BOOK

“ You ought to have a will of iron if you’re made of the right stuff,” she continued, addressing the Tray; “ you ought to keep order, but you say nothing and do less.”

“ You see, he’s only a waiter—slow and unpolished,” added the Teapot spitefully.

“ My view, if I may express it—” broke in the Cup from Margate.

“ When I want your view, either of Margate or of politeness,” retorted the Tray, interrupting the remark, “ I’ll ask for it. If I’d the chance I’d drop the whole lot of you, and get friendly with a new set, that I would !”

Whereupon the irrepressible Kettle chirruped—

“ Then he’d pay the expense of the mender’s bill—

 The mender is Doctor, you see—

 Who makes out an order,

 A matter of sawder

 And rivets, cement, and a fee.”

“ You’re always brewing mischief !” said Nurse’s Cup angrily to the Teapot; “ there’ll be no peace for any of us where you are.”

“ That’s true !” screamed out the little Tea-leaves inside the pot; “ he’s always getting us into hot water.”

“ I’ll draw the tannin out of the whole ounce of you ! You’re about as sensible as mortals who haven’t the wit to understand us. But when we go

THE STORM THE TEAPOT BREWED

cracked like Muggins over there, or stony broke like the Juggins next to him, or get smashed up altogether with age or lack of care, they take notice of us at last, and then there is a mighty fine fuss."

At this the Kettle, getting somewhat out of breath from his exertions, bubbled out in a high key—

“They’re Wedgwood, Staffordshire, Japanese too,
They’re a breakable lot, we know ;
When any one cracks any,
Chelsea or Saxony,
Dresden, or Worcester, or Bow,
They make as much shindy
As if a big windy
Was shivered to bits by a blow.”

The Teapot went on : “Those people are amusing, too ; they think we ought to last for ever, when they can’t do it themselves.”

“A couple of chatterpots !” exclaimed the Nurse’s Cup. “Dear me ! What with your spouting, and his showing off once he begins to sing, you’re enough to wear one out !”

“Dear you, indeed !” returned the Teapot ; “cheap you ! Why, you were given away with a pound of tea ! Shouldn’t be surprised at all !” he continued, watching Nurse’s Cup become speechless with indignation. “But, spouting aside, I could tell you a thing or two.”

THE RAINBOW BOOK

“Or three—or four—or five—or—” The Kettle might have sung on into billions had he not begun to choke over it, and splutter, and gurgle. Then he grew vexed, and snorted, and got angrier and angrier, until finally, in order to breathe more easily, he knocked his lid on one side, and began to boil with rage.

“Ha, ha!” laughed the Teapot mockingly. “The old fellow’s getting his steam up. Pray don’t de-range yourself, sir, on our account. He, he! He’s getting water on his nob!”

This didn’t seem to comfort the Kettle much.

“What do you think about it, Spoonies?” added the Teapot. But the Spoons heeded him not. They were conversing quietly in couples, and didn’t care to be drawn into argument. So he turned his attention elsewhere, bent on brewing discord. “People are so thoughtless,” he complained, turning a cold shoulder to the others. “Muggins, my boy, I’m beginning to get quite chilly; just go and fetch my cosy coat.” He knew this was an impossibility, and he only said it in order to pick a quarrel. But, noticing a distant Plate who was openly laughing at him, he cuttingly remarked: “Seen the plumber, lately?” Now, the Plate happened to be suffering severely from rivets, an infirmity which she vainly tried to hide, and which she hated to be noticed. So, getting

THE STORM THE TEAPOT BREWED

no reply, he added, “ I presume that your plum-bago is better.”

The Kettle was now puffing and spitting to such a degree that it was difficult to imagine he was the same jolly fellow who had been singing so good-temperedly all the time.

And the Teapot was content. He had gained his object, and the whole set felt as though they had been wiped the wrong way, when suddenly noisy voices were heard outside.

The nursery door was opened, and in burst Fred, home from Margate School, followed by gentle little Effie ; and Nurse, vigorously protesting at being pushed forward in jerks by Bob. Poor, long-suffering Nurse, as usual, was not having at all a good time with the three troublesome boys. Daniel had clambered on her back, and was trying to pull off her cap. Bob—who was not nearly such “ A Good Boy ” as his mug pretended—slily untied her apron-strings. The apron dropped, and Nurse tripped over it, jerking Daniel on to the floor ; and she would have fallen too had she not just saved herself by clutching the table.

“ Cr-cr-crikey ! ” clattered the China on the tray in alarm.

“ Bless those boys ! ” cried Nurse, as she replaced her apron ; but they only laughed. Effie was helping to put her cap straight when the

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Kettle, unable to contain his feelings any longer, marked his indignation by hissing disapproval and then boiling over. Nurse rushed to his aid, and altered his position so that he couldn't see all that went on. He recovered himself at once.

Bustling into their chairs, they all sat down to tea, and at the sudden action the whole tea-set rattled to arms, some standing at attention. The Spoons, stirred by the children's hands, began knocking the sides of the Cups, dealing them blows right and left, and ringing out their resounding protests.

“Here's a ‘stranger’!” exclaimed Effie, taking a tea-leaf out of her cup. “Who will it be?”

“A horrid foreigner, miss—a little black Indian,” replied the Teapot, turning up his spout with scorn, and giving a vicious squeeze to the others he held prisoners.

“I know who it is!” said Bob, tilting back his chair, then suddenly steadying himself by grasping the table. This was a troublesome habit of his, which drew Nurse's usual reminder.

“What's his name?” asked the others eagerly.

“*I* know—it's a secret,” replied Bob mysteriously. At this a loud argument began.

“My lid! Who's making the noise now?” the Teapot cried. “Pray don't upset your preciousselves.”

“I think it must be Mr. Manners who is the

THE STORM THE TEAPOT BREWED

stranger," exclaimed Nurse, putting her hands to her ears to shut out the tumult.

"No!" shouted Bob. "I'll tell you—his name's Mr. Tea-leaf!" And he laughed triumphantly.

As the other children raised their voices to declare it was very unfair, Bob swung back on his chair again.

"Oh!" screamed Nurse in a fright, making a grab at the table. But she was too late!

Bob had already made a grab at it when, with a *Swish! Bang!* he tumbled over backwards, dragging the cloth with him, and everything upon it. And the crockery lay around, all broken to atoms!

In the moment of hushed alarm that followed, the Tray rolled away, exclaiming in triumph: "I've got rid of them at last! I said I would when I got the chance!" And the Kettle, gazing at the wreckage, sang on serenely and merrily—

"There's been such a fuss, such a storm has been brewed,
There's no cups for the tea, and no plates for the food;
The cleverest doctor may puzzle his wits,
But he never can gather and rivet the bits!"



MONICA THE MOON CHILD

I

THIS SIDE OF THE MOON

IT was one of those late afternoons in winter when the countryside looks very white, very still, and hushed to sleep under its coverlet of snow—just the time when the bright fire at home is thought of with delightful longing. The gentleman who drove the phaeton that was bowling along the frosty road must have thought so too, for he cracked his whip so smartly that it sounded loud in the silent landscape, startling the cob to a more hurried remembrance of his snug stable.

MONICA THE MOON CHILD

“ Not very far now, Doctor,” he remarked to the friend who sat next to him. “ Home soon, Toodleums,” he added, turning towards a big bundle of shawls at the back of the carriage.

“ I’m in no hurry, Papa,” replied a childish voice ; “ I call this lovely ! ”

“ Quite warm, eh ? ”

“ Quite, thank you, Papa.”

The bundle, answering to the name of Toodleums, was Monica—her father’s constant companion. She was an only child. Her mother had always been delicate, and Monica was not allowed to be much with her. She even forgot that the invalid at home was ailing rather more than usual to-day, and that their long drive was to fetch her old friend the Doctor for his opinion, for she was listening with so much interest to an explanation which her father was giving of the new airship he had invented. He was still describing his successful trial trip, when Monica noticed that the moon and stars seemed to have assembled all at once to make a night of it. Never before had she driven out after dark, and soon she became all absorbed, in a state of muffled-up rapture, at the unusual sights and aspect of mystery about.

“ Hi ! Toodleums, do you hear ? What do you say to going up with me in my airship next time I go ? Will you come ? ”

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“Yes, yes,” she answered eagerly; “I’ll come, Papa.”

“You’re not afraid of bumping up against the moon?” asked the doctor playfully, leaning over to pat her cheek. And both gentlemen laughed. Monica didn’t answer. She didn’t know if she was being made fun of or not.

At last they were in the hall at home, amidst the lights and bustling of the servants. As no one seemed to notice her, Monica took herself up to the nursery. She had dressed there near the fire, and the boxes and things had not been tidied away. Monica stared around, thinking this very unusual, and was just beginning to feel uncomfortably lonely when a little wrinkled old woman with very bright eyes hurriedly trotted in.

“Oh, Grandnurse,” exclaimed Monica, “no one is looking after me. How’s Mamma?”

“Much better, Dearie. But I’m wanted downstairs; can you spare me, Poppets? Put yourself to bed, and I’ll be back directly with your hot milk.” Without waiting for an answer she bustled into the adjoining night nursery, where Monica heard her busily opening and shutting the great cupboards.

The cheery old body was called Grandnurse because she had been in the family for ever so long—so long as to have become, as it were, a member of

MONICA THE MOON CHILD

it. Passing through the nursery again she stopped and said—

“ What would my Poppets say to a little sister, I wonder ! A tiny new baby ! ”

“ Oh, Grandnurse ! ” And before the old woman could hurry out of the door Monica sprang forward, her face all aglow with excitement, and holding her tight by the arm cried all in a breath—

“ Is it true ? Where is it ? When’s it coming ? Who’s going to bring it ? ”

“ Patience ; I can’t wait now. Let me go, Dearie,” said Grandnurse, disengaging herself from the little girl.

“ But is it true ? ”

“ Quite true.”

“ What will it come in ? ”

“ A bandbox, of course,” answered Grandnurse, laughing gaily as she went out of the room.

“ Can I fetch it ? When can I fetch it ? ” persisted Monica, following her downstairs.

“ When there’s a blue moon. Now go back, there’s a dear.”

“ Yes, but who’s going to bring it ? ”

“ Don’t ask me—ask the man in the moon,” said the little old woman over her shoulder in a hushed voice as she disappeared down a dark passage of the large house.

Monica, standing there, laughed a little scornful

THE RAINBOW BOOK

laugh. "Ask the man in the moon, indeed!" she muttered. "As though there were one! She often says that, but I'm not so silly as to believe it." And full of thought of the new little sister she re-entered the nursery.

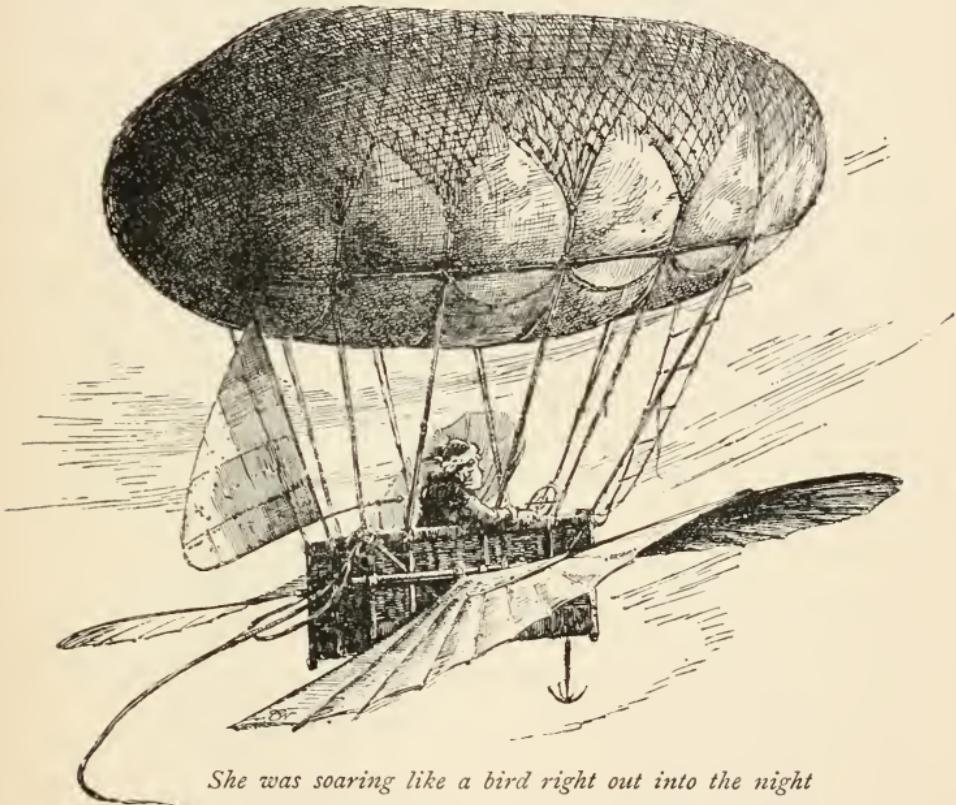
The heavy curtains had not been drawn, and the moon was looking at her just as it had done during the drive. How lovely it was, that drive! She went to the large window seat and curled herself up in her favourite corner. Outside it looked so cold and white that she drew the curtain close around her with a little shiver.

"Can Grandnurse really think there is a man in the moon?" pondered Monica as she gazed up at it; and confusedly she thought on: "I wonder if there is, after all. Can he be going to bring the baby? I should so like to know, and when, or who is going to—I wish he'd tell me—perhaps if I were to ask—who spoke about bumping up against the moon? Ah!!"

Monica had conceived a grand idea. Quietly she stole to the table, snatched up the empty hatbox which ought to have been tidied away, and then—and then she crept stealthily downstairs—everything was quiet—stealthily out into the night she went. Now she was in the great shed, where the airship was—quite an old friend. She had seen her father start on his journey in it, and had heard it all

MONICA THE MOON CHILD

explained. The precious bandbox was placed in the car, and the next moment Monica was beside it. She touched a button. The great structure moved. She held her breath, and her heart thumped sur-



She was soaring like a bird right out into the night

prisingly. Then she clapped her hands with delight—the airship slowly moved forward out of the shed, and when she pulled a lever thing, close at hand, she was soaring like a bird right out into the night, soaring right up towards the heavens. She was

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going to ask the Man in the Moon to be kind enough to give her the new baby she had come to fetch.

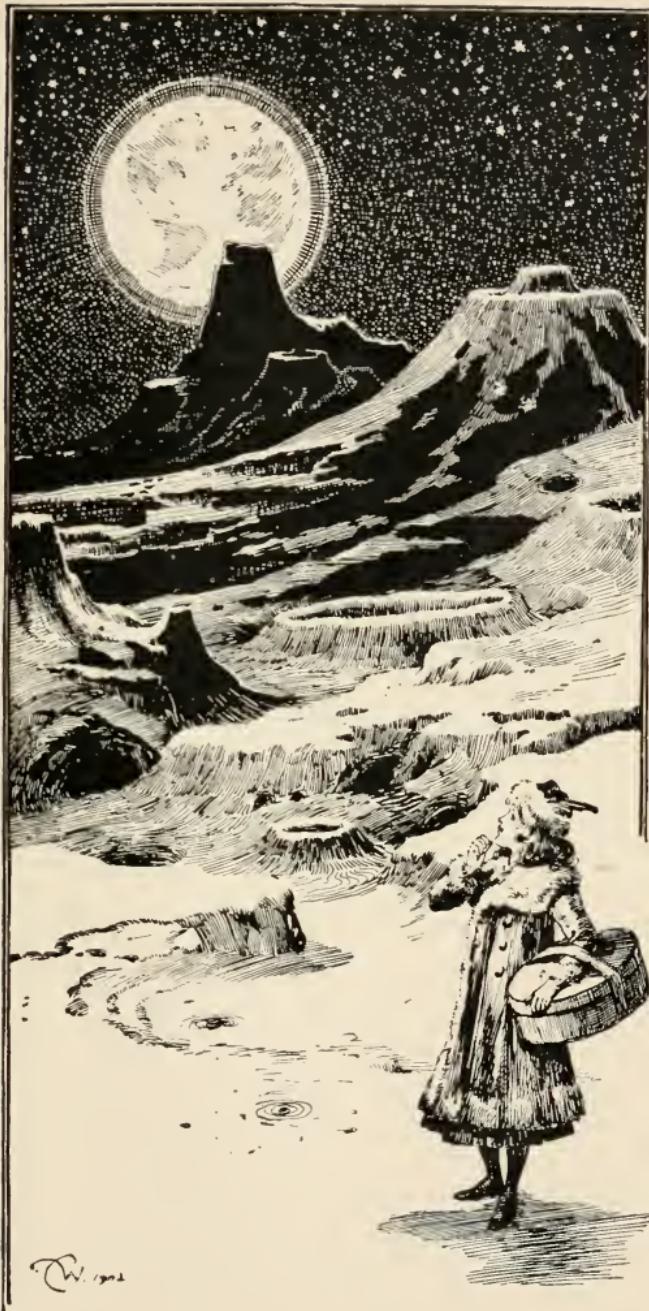
How cold and crisp the air was! Monica was glad to have on her coat and cap of fur. Higher, higher she went until she lost consciousness of everything except the cold and a sense of loneliness.

And the airship rose upwards, upwards, carrying its pretty burden with eyes fast closed, and the curly brown head lay helplessly low, supported by the staring white empty bandbox.

Bump! There was a crunching noise as of carriage wheels on a gravel path. The airship was aground on something, and Monica realised she must get her wits about her. She quickly pushed back the lever thing and the noise ceased, the movement also.

In the brilliant light, like sunlight, Monica saw she had alighted on some rocks, whilst round about was nothing but mountains, craters, caverns, and awful stillness. There was not a creature about, nor a sign of anything living. It was dreary to a degree.

“Wherever am I?” exclaimed little Monica. She scrambled out of the car, and slung the bandbox on her arm—somehow there was company in that. Above her a moon was shining—not *the* moon she was accustomed to see, but one about four times



Round about was nothing but mountains, craters, caverns

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MONICA THE MOON CHILD

larger, as though suffering from a swollen face, with a pattern on it like the map of Europe.

“That does look queer,” she muttered aloud. “Bumped against the moon!” she thought to herself unconsciously. For now she remembered her father having told her what the earth must look like from there; and she realised that she had reached her destination, and was actually walking about in the moon, and that the larger moon was really the earth. This fact was so exciting that she sat down to consider it, enjoy its importance, and decide what to do.

She determined to go on, and so she rose and went gaily forward, the bandbox swinging from her arm. But it was very difficult walking, steep and rocky.

At last she found herself in a large plain of broken stones—“much in want of a steam roller,” thought Monica as she bravely hobbled along—and all around were caves.

Out of the largest one of these there emerged a tall and majestic figure, which, to her astonishment, slowly glided sideways towards her, wrapped in a cloudy drapery. Then Monica was convinced; and she no longer had any doubt whatever but that there was a Man in the Moon, and that this was he. So very slowly did he advance that she had plenty of time to recover from her surprise, and went forward to meet him and introduce herself.

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His steely blue eye had a peculiar cold beam in it as he said—

“I bid you unwelcome! Are you not frightened?”

“No,” replied the child. “Why should I be? I’ve done no harm.”

“Do you call coming here no harm?” All the time he never stopped still a second, but kept gloomily mooning about, his profile with its protruding nose and chin in sharp outline always turned towards her.

“I’ve come to—to fetch—” stammered Monica, chilled by her reception.

“You’re a trespasser! You’re evidently a poacher, too,” he added, glancing angrily at the bandbox. “Begone!”

“But, please sir, do tell me——”

With a warning gesture the Man slowly raised his arm till its cloud-like drapery hid his face, and he disappeared.

“Dear me! I don’t like him a little bit!” murmured Monica, staring vacantly about, and found that where he had stood there was a big board on which in big letters was inscribed—

TRESPASSERS WILL BE MOONSTRUCK.

BY ORDER.

MONICA THE MOON CHILD

At the sight of it Monica quickly took refuge in the smallest of the caves.

“Who are you?” said a voice; and as soon as her eyes had become accustomed to the gloom she saw a queer creature resembling a great toad swathed in a long white beard.

“Whoever you are,” said the quaint inhabitant, “I’m too blind to see you. Just lead me to the further corner, there’s a good trespasser.”

Monica did not quite like being talked to like that, but she held out the bandbox and, supporting himself by it, her new acquaintance limped to where he was led and sat down.

“Thanks, and many of them. It’s not so draughty here,” he said.

“Have you been long in this cave?” asked Monica.

“A few thousand years or so—I can’t tell to a minute,” he mumbled. “But who are you, my dear? By birth, of course, a Lunarian, but not by accent.”

Monica mentioned who she was. Whereupon he became quite talkative, and began telling her about the moon, but only what she had read in her lesson books.

“Have you a House of Parliament?” she asked, anxious to glean useful information. She had

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recently been to hear her father speak in theirs at home, and was very proud of that.

“We’ve only a moonicity, you know,” said her strange companion, rambling on until he became quite drowsy. Emboldened by his kind manner, she told him why she had come, and begged for his advice. To her dismay the only reply she got was a series of the loudest snores she had ever heard. He was sound asleep.

“Do tell me what I had better do,” she implored, and she shook and pinched him till he awoke.

“Get on the right side of him, and don’t bother me,” croaked the old creature, and snored louder than ever. Delighted at the hint, Monica came out on to the plain, and saw the Man gliding slowly on, sideways, as before. He frowned heavily on seeing her there, and seemed speechless with indignation.

“Get on the right side of him,” repeated Monica to herself as she made a dart forward to do so. This proved unsuccessful, for just then he turned so blue that she stopped, wondering if he was getting a fit. Grandnurse’s words, “When there’s a blue moon,” suddenly occurred to her, and she knew that now was her chance. She took courage in his slowness, and without looking at him a second time she rushed, stooping low, into a very small cave on the other side of him.

MONICA THE MOON CHILD

II

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON

IT was not a cave at all. It was an arbour, the beams of which were moonbeams, so that Monica stepped straight through into it and sat down upon a bench.

“Evidently the moon is not made of green cheese, as Grandnurse always thought,” pondered Monica with the pride of the discoverer. “I must remember to tell her that.” And she was just tying a knot in her handkerchief to remind herself when she was startled to hear a musical voice say—

“Are you aware that you are on the wrong side of the moon?” It belonged to a tiny figure no bigger than Monica’s doll, dressed like a lady gardener, with apron, straw hat, and big gloves.

“The little blind man in the cave told me it is the right side for me,” replied Monica politely.

“Oh!! He’s never done so before. But if Toady told you that, then no one can blame the Gardeness. Who are you?”

“I am Monica.”

“It’s a strange name. Some parents have queer fancies. You are the first moon child who has ever come back. How you have grown, to be sure; I shouldn’t have known you!” When she heard

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*A tiny figure, no bigger
than Monica's doll*

Monica's errand and had refreshed her memory as to where she lived, she remarked with surprise, "We've

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had an order for one to be sent to your address to-day. We always forward to customers' houses. But people *never* come and fetch them. It's a most unheard-of proceeding!" added the little lady with a toss of her pretty head. "Where's your check?"

"Cheque? Have I got to buy it? I've just spent all my money on a new doll," said Monica, her eyes filling with tears, "and now I might have bought the new baby instead!"

"We're on the check system here," said the little lady, smiling. "Come with me and I'll show you round, then you'll see what nonsense you're talking."

Monica brightened up, and they proceeded down a trim gravel path that had a moonstone wall on either side and a big door at the end.

"Who are you, please?" asked Monica as they went along.

"Where you come from, clever people call me Selene. Here, I am the Gardeness.—Your pass check," she added in a business-like way. "To Order or Bearer—which do you want?" The child hesitated. "You want to order a baby, I suppose?" The Gardeness was becoming rather impatient.

"Oh yes, I've come to fetch it."

"But you can't have a cheque to Order and Bearer at the same time."

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“Can’t I ?” inquired Monica plaintively. “How can I take it, then ?”

“That will be my business,” whispered her companion mysteriously ; then added loudly : “The little ones are being checked in the Counting House now. Be quick, or the pick of the choice will be gone.”

“To Order,” faltered Monica.

Whereupon her companion pushed the great door, which swung open, and the quaint pair quickly passed through. “They are always on order,” remarked the Gardeness as she led Monica up a high flight of steps, “but we forward them in our own way. Excuse my question ; it was a matter of form.”

Now they were in the loveliest garden ever seen, and Monica gave a little sob of delight as she noticed that all around about her in every flower nestled the dearest, wee-est little baby imaginable, whilst hundreds of tiny creatures were tending them, drying the dew-drops from their big round eyes, and turning their little bald heads for more air, all the while humming a refrain which Monica recognised as her Mother’s favourite one, called the “Bee’s Wedding.”

At first she marvelled silently at the beauty of the scene. Then, as she basked in the pervading warmth, she remembered having been surprised at

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seeing the moon and sun out at the same time, and now realised the moon was sunning its garden of babies.

“I’ve brought my bandbox,” she remarked, laughing gaily.

“That’s a good thing,” replied her companion, “as it has to be a private transaction. Stoop down,”



Rows upon rows of the beautifullest roses

and she drew Monica closer to the rows upon rows of the beautifullest roses, gently moved the petals of one of them, and revealed embedded in the heart of the rose its own sweet little baby.

Then the Gardeness told Monica with infinite pride about the flower infants under her care. To

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her visitor's remark on their resemblance to each other, she replied touchily, "I suppose you've seen many girls called Rose, who were alike when born, but they differ enough later! It's the same with the rest."

The Gardeness pointed out to her the children with the names of Lily, Daisy, Sweet William, and others, all borne up by their especial flower; her own flower, the Gardenia; and the Marigold's Mary; and told her how in some flowers the children imbibe their tastes from their surroundings. Thus, as they strolled around, Monica heard that the Dandelion turns out too foppish a child: that amongst the wild oats the harum-scarum boys develop: that the Blue Cornflower babies remain true to their liking for farinaceous food: and in Love-lies-bleeding, little Cupids are born.

Monica went through the vegetable garden and saw the turnips, where the noses of the infants looked so funny. "They generally take a dislike to vegetables later on," explained the Gardeness; "now those over there," pointing to a bed of 18-carrots, "are as good as gold. But we must not linger here. You shall have a peep at the orchard, and visit the Counting House; then you must be quick and make your choice."

In the orchard were only boy babies, some sweet-tempered, others sour. The Gardeness wouldn't

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recommend a gooseberry one, for it was apt to grow up silly. There were some rosy, apple-cheeked ones, but they looked *all* cheek. Little gipsy-faced babies peeped with black eyes from out of the blackberry bushes; whilst in the fruit and nut trees close by were many pairs of hard-headed little twins, all Philips and Philippines.

“There’s no time,” observed the Gardeness, “to visit the Indian garden, or the Chinese, or the others; I should like to have shown you some quaint little baby girls called Peach Blossom in the Japanese garden. But after all, I suppose you prefer an English one? They are generally chosen according to climate.” And seeing Monica smile and nod, she hurried her off to the Counting House.

Monica had not been considering at all what she should choose, for she had lost her heart to that first little Rose baby.

Very soon they reached their destination—a long, low building. “Listen!” said the Gardeness, drawing her to an open window. “They are actually quarrelling over it again!” There was a fearful hubbub going on inside, above which could be distinguished—

“If one times six is six—six times one must be one! So that fat infant weighs more than one and six!”

“Ah!” exclaimed her guide, “a stupid wrangle!

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No wonder that complaints arise, and that the children don't always arrive at their destinations in time. It causes no end of bother. "Pass in!" The noise ceased, and in the enormous room hundreds of babies freshly gathered from the garden were being numbered and ticketed by a regular little army of miniature hospital nurses, who received instructions from their superiors standing behind the counter. As she entered, Monica heard that No. 47,859,056—a dear little Indian baby—was to be forwarded to some strange-sounding address in Calcutta, where it was expected in 27 days, 7 hours, 48 minutes, and 11·5 seconds (very business-like, but it would have been simpler to say that day next month, for it was a lunar month).

As it was carried away, Monica and her guide followed and entered the Packing and Forwarding Department, and saw it wrapped up in cabbage leaves, packed in one of the numerous bandboxes which lined the walls, and gently warned that if it cried much it would crack its voice. Then the box was labelled "FRAGILE! WITH CARE!" and put down a trap-door in the floor, where it disappeared from view.

The babies were being brought in rapidly, packed with all despatch, and each received advice, such as, to sleep as much as it could after the journey; when bored, to suck its thumb; to try and get its

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own way whenever possible; and when it disapproved, to express the same in the usual manner.

Immediately they got outside the Gardeness advised Monica, as her parents were well-to-do, to choose a set of twins, which were not welcome everywhere, and thus save them being planted on a poor family, for they had to be got off somehow, so were always sent (as if by mistake) where least expected. But Monica mentioned her choice, and begged very hard for it. So the Gardeness took the bandbox from her, bade her wait behind a tree, and with that little toss of the head went to gather the Rose baby which had been sent for in so unheard-of a way. Monica waited there so long that she became very anxious.

At last the Gardeness returned, pale and out of breath, hurriedly warned her not to let in any cold air on to the child, which was packed all snug and comfortable in the bandbox, and, above all, to make all speed or she would meet some one she wouldn't like, showed her a short cut to the boundary, kissed her hand, and was gone.

Monica, trembling all over with excitement, hastened away with her precious burden, the difference in weight being scarcely perceptible. She ran quickly towards the spot where she had left the airship, quickly placed her treasure and herself inside, and had just touched the "drop spring"

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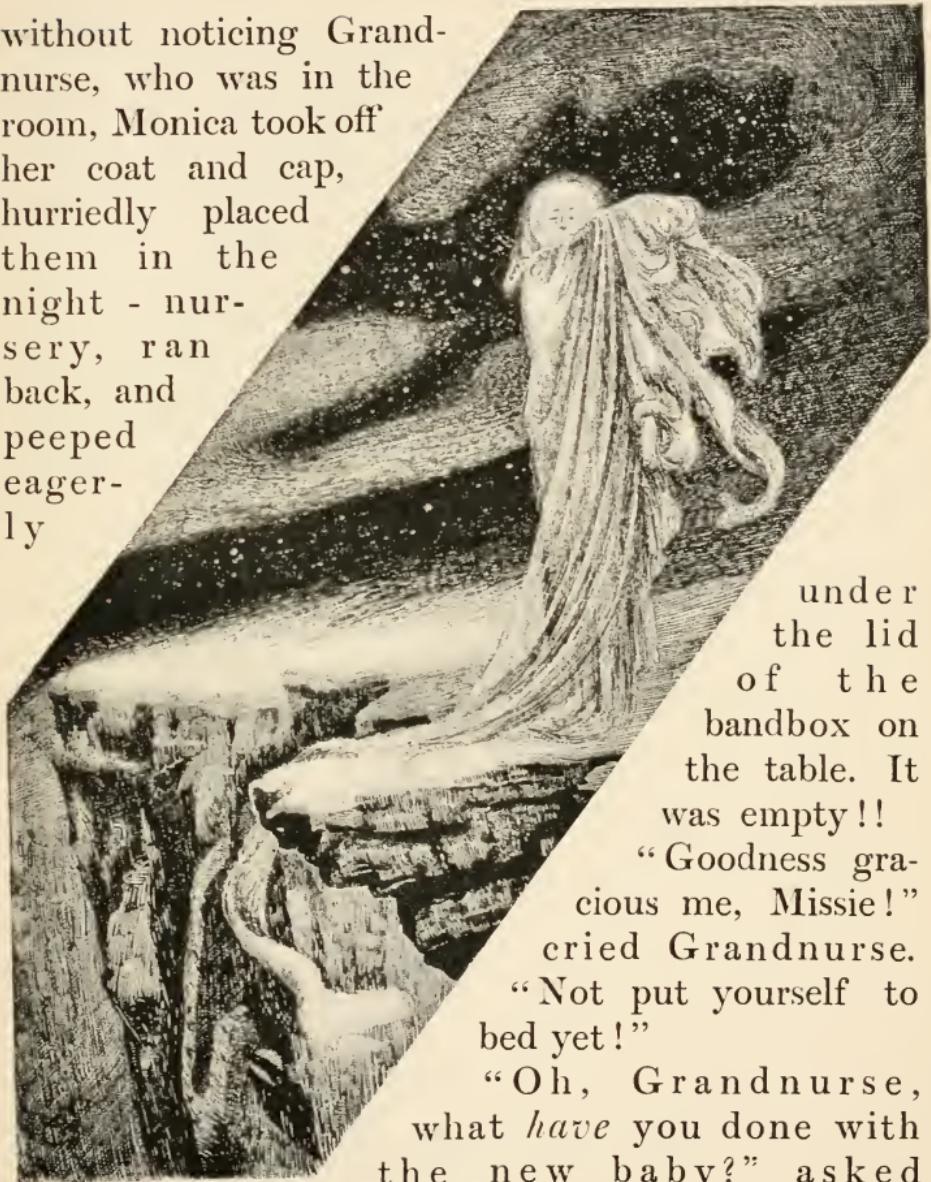
when the Man in the Moon appeared, approaching slowly. His face was turned fully towards her, and looked quite different from what it had been before, calm and expressionless. But she did not trust it, and was thankful when she pushed off and felt the airship was moving away. Feeling safe at last, Monica smiled in triumph; with one hand she raise her bandbox on high, with the other she waved a farewell. Then the Man, as if in protest, lifted his arm so that his face once more was hidden in gloom.

And Monica felt herself dropping, dropping rapidly into the blackness of the icy cold night.

She was thinking: "My book says that no one on earth has ever seen the other side of the moon, so no one knows what on earth is on the other side of it. That's why Grandnurse couldn't answer my questions properly—and the Man wouldn't. Perhaps even he has never seen the Garden of Babies, as he was far too tall to enter that small cave. How lucky I found it all out for myself!"—when, with a great start she came to earth and confusedly recognised the lighted windows of her home. How she got the airship back into its shed and how she entered the nursery window she never quite remembered. Throwing back the heavy curtain from the window seat,

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without noticing Grandnurse, who was in the room, Monica took off her coat and cap, hurriedly placed them in the night-nursery, ran back, and peeped eagerly



under
the lid
of the
bandbox on
the table. It
was empty!!

“Goodness gracious me, Missie!”

cried Grandnurse.
“Not put yourself to
bed yet!”

“Oh, Grandnurse,
what *have* you done with
the new baby?” asked

*The Man lifted his arm so that his
face was once more hidden in gloom*

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Monica piteously, great tears brimming over her eyes.

"They must always be unpacked at once, you know, without a moment's delay. Come and see, my Poppets, for I'm sure you won't rest without," added the kind old woman, leading her away.

And there, in a dressing-room, in a bassinette, already cosily asleep but still sucking its thumb, Monica beheld with rapture the tiny Rose baby she had chosen in that lovely garden high up in the moon—in Cloudland far away.

THE END

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